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174

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Editor-in-Chief	Chris Youngs
Senior Art Director	Jon Schindehette
Web Specialist	Steve Winter
Web Production	Bart Carroll
Contributing Authors	Bruce R. Cordell, Scott Fitzgerald Gray, Arnie Franke, Ed Greenwood, Ari Marmell, Mike Mearls, Jeff Morgenroth, Stephen Radney-MacFarland, Robert J. Schwalb, James Wyatt
Developers	Peter Schaefer, Stephen Schubert, Rodney Thompson
Editor	Miranda Horner, Steve Winter
Cover Artist	Mark Zug
Contributing Artists	Wayne England, Jeremy Jarvis, Jorge Lacera, Raven Mimura, William O'Connor, David Rapoza,
Cartographers	Mike Schley, Jason Engle
Publishing Production Specialists	Angelika Lokotz, Erin Dorries, Christopher Tardiff
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D&D Creative Manager	Christopher Perkins
Executive Producer, D&D Insider	Chris Champagne
Director of RPG R&D	Bill Slavicsek

Special Thanks

Richard Baker, Greg Bilsland, Michele Carter, Jennifer Clarke Wilkes, Andy Collins, Bruce R. Cordell, Jeremy Crawford, Peter Lee, Mike Mearls, Kim Mohan, Cal Moore, Peter Schaefer, Stephen Schubert, Matthew Sernett, Rodney Thompson, James Wyatt

Elemental Chaos, Ahoy!

It's a brave New Year. I've never been one for powerful, motivating, inspiring resolutions. I find the setting of new goals on January 1 a little arbitrary. I mean, if you're going to set a new goal, why wait? But in the spirit of the holiday, I do have one resolution: I want to spend more time in the Elemental Chaos.

OK, not me personally. That would suck rocks. Hot, magma rocks, most likely. No, I want to spend more D&D time in the Elemental Chaos. I want my campaign's heroes to adventure there. I want to pack up my characters and head out myself.

Why the sudden interest in the Elemental Chaos?

I feel like we've spent much more time in the Shadowfell and the Feywild, which means to say we've devoted more magazine space to their exploration and expansion. The Astral Sea follows close on the heels of these two. But the red-headed stepchild of the bunch has been the Elemental Chaos. We haven't set any adventures there (although we dipped our toe). We haven't featured many articles that touch on the plane, either. Well, that's changing, and in a big way.

Last month saw the release of *The Plane Below: Secrets of the Elemental Chaos*. This was the first book since *Manual of the Planes* to really start to uncover the secrets of this plane. Now, we're catching up with digital content.

This month, we're devoting one adventure and one feature article to the Elemental Chaos, and there are more on the way. This month's Scales of War adventure takes epic-level characters to the City of Brass, where they'll need all their wits to survive the Byzantine efreeti politics. The City of Brass has to be one of the best possible locations for adventures—but not just for the epic tier. The questions of why the City of Brass's influence isn't larger and what the efreet families will do to further their goals in the city's structure are great launch points for adventure.

What about the rest of the city? We only scratch the surface this month. Just consider all the other denizens, permanent or transient, who visit the City of Brass. Many of them make excellent threats or foils for low-paragon tier characters. With a little work, you could send a group of heroic characters there, if for no other reason than to let them dabble in its zaniness as a taste for later adventure.

As for our feature—we have the "Red Shoals of Dkar," which describes pirates who ply the treacherous seas within a perpetual chaos storm that rages across the plane. Islands within the storm, known as the Red Shoals of Dkar, form a home base from which these pirates light out to attack seaside settlements and ships of the mortal world before sailing back to their home base on the Elemental Chaos, loot in tow. These pirates have unique knowledge and magical prowess that lets them safely navigate these storms, making the Red Shoals like Shipwreck Cove on steroids.

I mean, pirates sailing seas of fire through chaos storms? This is good stuff! Consider an adventure villain who appears and disappears at will throughout the course of a campaign. Now make that villain a pirate on a ship that sails the planar seas—does it get any better? As an alternative, consider giving your adventurers a ship like this of their own, or the option to join the crew of one of these vessels. Just think of the adventure potential when the adventurers' home base is a pirate ship that sails through the Elemental Chaos to any sea of the mortal realm, or possibly beyond.

How have we let the Elemental Chaos lie fallow for so long? My only excuse is that the world of D&D is big—bigger than we could ever handle in full. But we're going to use 2010 to make a dent in the Elemental Chaos.

What are your favorite parts of the Elemental Chaos? What would you like to see us tackle next in an article or adventure? Send us your feedback to dndinsider@wizards.com, or better yet, your adventure or article pitch to submissions@wizards.com

Chaos Scar: A Chance Encounter

HEROIC
1–10

A Chaos Scar Adventure
By Robert J. Schwalb
Illustrations by Jorge Lacera
Cartography by Jason A. Engle

"A Chance Encounter" is a single combat encounter for a group of five 1st-level characters set in the Chaos Scar. The adventurers find a wagon sinking into a hole despite the best efforts by the struggling horse pulling it. Yellow-robed attendants fight to pull the wagon free, but the wagon's slide and the horse's screams suggest their efforts are futile. Should the PCs lend a hand, however, they find their good intentions met with cold steel, bitter curses, and a wild three-way fight.

If you're not playing a Chaos Scar campaign, you can still use this adventure by integrating it into any existing campaign on a road through a remote wilderness area.

For details on the Chaos Scar and its environs, read the Chaos Scar introduction and check out the map of the entire valley.

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Background

In a village not far from the Chaos Scar, a simple trader named Pung made a poor investment. A curious glass box came into his possession by way of a grubby adventurer. It was curious, but a crude piece compared to the jewels and other items the seller offered. With the adventurer a few gold pieces richer, Pung went about his business, the box nearly forgotten. But that night, unsettling images plagued his dreams, and they continued each night thereafter, growing more disturbing, until his fraying sanity unraveled altogether. Each dream was unique, but each featured one common element: the strange glass box he'd purchased.

A god was speaking to him, Pung was certain. And it was speaking to him through the cube. So Pung shut the doors to his general store, sold all of his possessions except for the glass box and a few yellow robes, and set out to make a new life for himself as a prognosticator—there was no doubt the visions portended the future. His predictions grew stranger and more sinister until his fellow visitors urged him to find some other home—at the point of pitchfork and with flames from their torches licking the back of his wagon.

Pung and the few unstable fellows who saw something special in him abandoned civilization for the wonders of the Chaos Scar, for the prophet was convince the god in his dreams slumbered somewhere in the valley. A tragic development, however, has derailed his plans, for his wagon has fallen afoul of a pit. If he and his fellows don't act quickly, his wagon, his horse, his possessions, and his dreams will disappear.

The Glass Cube

The glass cube is behind Pung's madness, for it imprisons an otherworldly entity known as a fell taint. The creature wants to be freed and has been working on its prison for years until now; the slightest jostle will break it. Once a resident in the Chaos Scar, lurking with several others of its kind (see "The Tainted Spiral" in *Dungeon* #173), the fell taint was captured by a curious mage passing nearby, imprisoned, and studied. The mage learned all he could, however, and sold the box as a curio as a (admittedly cruel) joke. The monster was able to exert some influence from its prison, however, and has gradually passed through many hands, each urging the bearer to bring the box back to the Chaos Scar. Now, nearly free from its prison, it is almost home.

Getting the Characters Involved

You can use this encounter at any point while the adventurers explore the lands just outside the valley proper. The heroes might stumble on the wagon while heading to a dungeon or on their way out, returning from a successful mission. You can use the following text to draw the PCs into the encounter.

A horse's shrill scream splits the air, followed by panicked shouting and the sound of splintering wood. You think it came from just behind the trees ahead.

Treasure Preparation

"A Chance Encounter" rewards a party with parcel 8 (see "Treasure Parcels" in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). Since the 120 gp worth of treasure is composed of a riding horse, wagon, and sack filled with silver, the PCs might leave some or all of the loot behind. Should this be the case, add the missing value to the treasure they find when they next gain a parcel.

Conclusion

Once Pung and the other creatures are defeated, the PCs are free to go about their business. However, you might expand this encounter into a full adventure. The ant tunnels might lead to the hive, wherein the PCs can fight giant ants to their hearts' content. Or, they might access one of the many dungeons littering the valley.

There's also the matter of the glass cube. Who sold the cube to Pung and why? Where did it come from? Is there some conspiracy behind its sale or is it just some strange trinket recovered from the Scar?

Sinking Fortunes

Encounter Level 1 (600 XP)

Setup

Pung (P)
4 Pung's believers (B)
1 hive soldier (S)
5 hive workers (A)
1 fell taint lasher (F)

Pung led his companions off the trail and into an open field. He didn't have the prophetic ability to note the ant tunnels riddling the earth beneath the grassy terrain. When his wagon rolled overtop a tunnel, the rear wheels dropped through the thin earth into the tunnel just below.

Pung stands on top of the wagon. His believers work to pull the wagon free from the hole. Don't place the giant ants or the fell taint yet (see Tactics, below).

When the PCs come upon the scene, read:

Through the trees, you spot a wagon sinking into the ground. The horse tied to the wagon screams and thrashes as it is pulled back to the hole. Several men and women dressed in yellow robes and matching round, brimless hats run about in panic. Climbing on top of the wagon and helping the situation not at all is a wild-eyed lunatic wielding a length of chain with a chunk of stone at the end. He looks around, spots you, and screams, "I have foreseen this! A trap! Kill them! Kill them all!"

Pung (P) **Level 2 Artillery (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 125

Initiative +1 **Senses** Perception +0
Ecstatic Fury aura 3; any ally that starts its turn in the aura slides 1 square and gains a +1 bonus to attack rolls until the start of its next turn.
HP 31; **Bloodied** 15; see also *wild swing*
AC 13; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 13, **Will** 16
Speed 6

⊕ **Flail** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+7 vs. AC; 1d10 + 1 damage.

⊕ **Bitter Epithets** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fear, Psychic**
Ranged 10; +7 vs. Will; 1d6 + 3 psychic damage, and the target takes 3 extra psychic damage if it ends its next turn closer to the mad prophet than where he began.

Perilous Order (standard; at-will)
Ranged 5; targets one ally; the target makes a charge attack and deals 3 extra damage.

Incite Bloodlust (standard; encounter)
Close burst 5; targets allies; the target makes a melee basic attack and deals 3 extra damage on hit (6 extra damage against prone targets).

Wild Swing (standard; requires flail; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Weapon**
Close burst 1; targets 1d4 random creatures in the burst; +5 vs. AC; 1d10 + 1 damage, and the target is knocked prone.

Rise Fool! (minor; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Healing**
Targets one dead ally; the target regains 1 hit point and stands up as a free action.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Skills Endurance +7, Intimidate +9
Str 12 (+2) **Dex** 10 (+1) **Wis** 8 (+0)
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 8 (+0) **Cha** 16 (+4)
Equipment robes, flail

4 Pung's Believers (B) **Level 1 Minion Brute**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 25 each

Initiative +1 **Senses** Perception –1
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 13; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 13, **Will** 12
Speed 6

⊕ **Kukri** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+4 vs. AC; 5 damage.

Pung! (when a Pung's believer drops to 0 hit points)
Close burst 5; target's Pung; Pung shifts 1 square toward the minion and rolls to recharge *rise fool!*

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Str 16 (+3) **Dex** 12 (+1) **Wis** 8 (–1)
Con 14 (+2) **Int** 8 (–1) **Cha** 10 (+0)
Equipment yellow robes, kukri

Hive Soldier (S) **Level 3 Soldier**
Medium natural beast XP 150

Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +0; low-light vision, tremorsense 10
HP 46; **Bloodied** 23; see also *death convulsion*
AC 18; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 12
Speed 6, climb 6

⊕ **Grasping Mandibles** (standard; usable only while the hive soldier does not have a creature grabbed; at-will)
+10 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the target is grabbed.

Acid Sting (standard; at-will) ✦ **Acid**
Targets a creature grabbed by the hive soldier; +10 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 acid damage, and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends).

Death Convulsions (when the hive soldier drops to 0 hit points)
Close burst 1; targets enemies; +8 vs. Reflex; the target is knocked prone.

Hive Soldier Frenzy (when any giant ant within 10 squares of the hive soldier drops to 0 hit points; at-will)
The soldier gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls until the end of its next turn.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 17 (+4) **Dex** 15 (+3) **Wis** 9 (+0)
Con 14 (+3) **Int** 2 (–3) **Cha** 4 (–2)

Fell Taint Lasher (F)	Level 1 Soldier
Small aberrant magical beast	XP 100
Initiative +3 **Senses** Perception +8	
HP 20; **Bloodied** 10	
AC 15; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 12, **Will** 14	
Resist insubstantial; **Vulnerable** 5 psychic	
Speed 1, fly 6 (hover)	
⊕ **Tendril Caress** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**	
+5 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 4 psychic damage.	
⸸ **Tendrils of Stasis** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**	
+5 vs. Will; 1d4 + 4 psychic damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of the fell taint lasher's next turn.	
Fell Taint Feeding (standard; at-will) ✦ **Healing**	
Targets a helpless or unconscious creature; the fell taint lasher loses insubstantial and its fly speed until the end of its next turn, and it makes a coup de grace against the target. If the lasher kills the target, it regains all of its hit points.	
Flowing Tendrils (free, when the fell taint lasher makes an opportunity attack; at-will)	
The lasher shifts 1 square.	
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –	
Str 11 (+0) **Dex** 12 (+1) **Wis** 16 (+3)	
Con 13 (+1) **Int** 4 (–3) **Cha** 10 (+0)	

5 Hive Workers (A)	Level 1 Minion Skirmisher
Medium natural beast	XP 25 each
Initiative +0 **Senses** Perception –1; low-light vision, tremorsense 10	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 15; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 13, **Will** 10	
Speed 6, climb 6, burrow 2 (tunneling)	
⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)	
+6 vs. AC; 4 damage.	
Hive Worker Frenzy (free, when any giant ant within 10 squares of the hive soldier is reduced to 0 hit points; at-will)	
The hive worker shifts 2 squares.	
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –	
Str 17 (+3) **Dex** 15 (+2) **Wis** 9 (–1)	
Con 14 (+2) **Int** 2 (–4) **Cha** 4 (–3)	

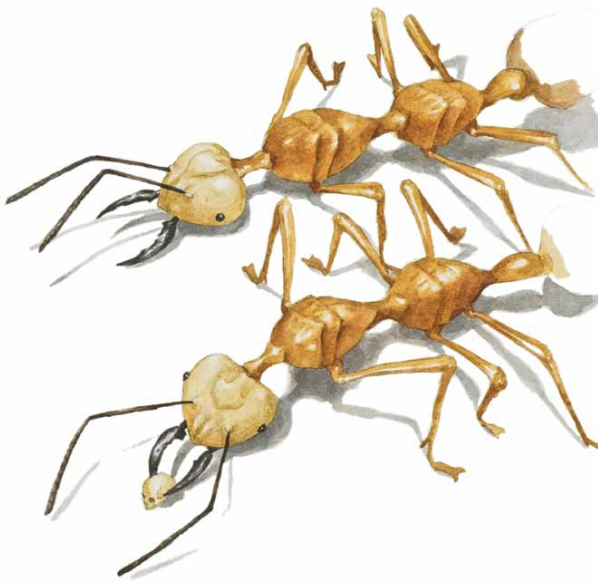
Tactics

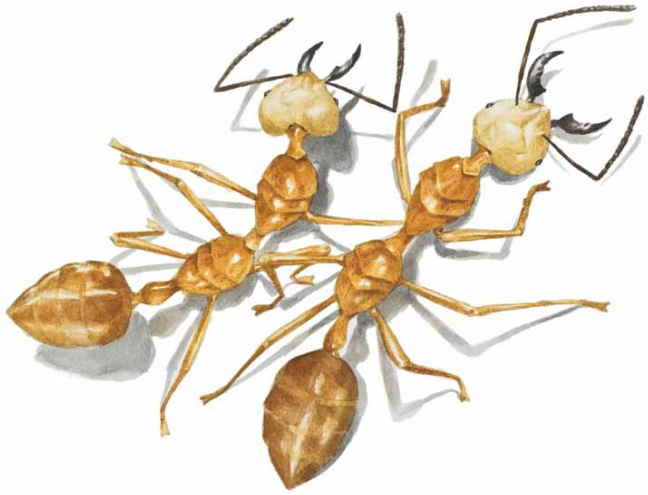
The encounter is composed of three groups of enemies: Pung and his believers, the giant ants, and the fell taint. Each group regards the other as an enemy.

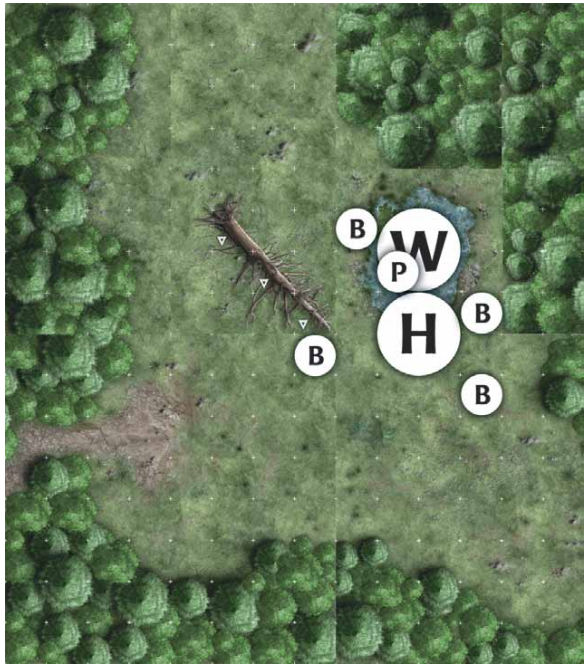
Pung's Group: Pung holds his position atop the wagon until he falls off (see Wagon, below). He uses *perilous order* to hurl his allies against the PCs, while peppering the adventurers with *bitter epithets*. Once his minions are engaged, Pung uses *incite bloodlust*. Pung can restore dead minions to life with *rise fool!* When a believer is slain, don't remove its miniature from the battlefield until Pung himself is dead. Pung fights to the death. When he drops, his surviving minions flee.

Giant Ants: The hive soldier and hive workers join the fight starting at the beginning of round 2. The hive soldier comes out first, entering an unoccupied square adjacent to the wagon. Each round thereafter, add one hive worker until you account for all five of them. The hive soldier uses *grasping mandibles* against the closest creature it can reach, targeting a PC before a believer or Pung. The soldier focuses its attacks against a single target at a time using *acid sting* when possible. The hive workers attack the closest enemy they can reach. Whenever a hive worker starts its turn adjacent to a dead or unconscious creature, it uses a minor action to pick up the creature and then moves to the hole with its meal in tow. All ants fight to the death.

Fell Taint: The fell taint only joins the combat when the glass cube shatters or when the wagon falls in the hole (thus shattering the cube). It appears in an unoccupied square adjacent to wherever it was released. The fell taint attacks the closest creature, giving preference to Pung. It never attacks the ants. Start with *tendrils of stasis* to keep an opponent pinned down and then follow up with tendril caress until it can use its *fell taint feeding* power.







Features of the Area

Panicked Horse (H): On the fourth round during initiative count 10, the horse slips and falls, pulled after the wagon into the hole. It and the wagon take 20 damage.

Adjacent characters can prevent this by succeeding on three checks using the Acrobatics, Diplomacy, Insight, or Nature skills (DC 10). Each time a character fails a check, the horse makes a kick attack as an opportunity action: +4 vs. AC; 1d6 + 4 damage. If the characters make three successful checks before the start of the fourth round, the horse is loosed from the wagon, which falls into the pit alone, automatically killing any hive workers still in the tunnel below. Once freed, the horse runs off to the battlefield's edge.

Wagon (W): The wagon is a Large vehicle with an enclosed bed. It has AC 3, Fortitude 10, Reflex 3, and 100 hit points. Entering the wagon's space costs 2 extra squares of movement. Each square in the wagon's space counts as difficult terrain.

A creature can climb inside the wagon's enclosed interior by entering the wagon's space and succeeding on a DC 5 Acrobatics check. Each round after the first, the DC increases by 5.

At the end of each round, the wagon shifts in the hole, forcing each creature on the wagon to make a DC 10 Acrobatics check. A failure means the creature falls prone in the wagon's square, while a failure by 5 or more means the creature falls prone in an unoccupied square adjacent to the wagon.

Ant Tunnel: Below the wagon is a 2-square wide tunnel that extends away from the hole in the direction of the Chaos Scar, and also a short way off to the east. The tunnel is tall enough to allow a Medium creature to stand. Climbing out from the tunnel requires a DC 10 Athletics check (DC 5 if the wagon has fallen).

Treasure: The characters can calm and claim the horse with a DC 5 Nature check. It is a riding horse worth 75 gp. The wagon is worth another 20 gp. Inside the wagon is a modest leather sack containing 250 sp. A DC 20 Arcana check made on the remains of the glass cube reveal it is the product of a Binding ritual. Success by 5 or more also reveals that when broken, the creature it contained was freed.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer whose more recent work can be found in *Martial Power*™ 2, *Draconomicon:*™ *Metallic Dragons*, and *Primal Power*™. Robert lives in Tennessee.

Sliver's Call

A Chaos Scar Adventure

By Stephen Radney-MacFarland

illustration by David Rapoza ✦ cartography by Jason A. Engle

"Sliver's Call" takes place in the Chaos Scar, near the King's Wall. The characters become entwined in the rivalry of a pair of arcane scholars searching for a long-lost treasure.

The wizard Casaubon hires a group of adventures to help him achieve his destiny. The characters must confront mercenaries, warlocks and an ancient evil as they unseal the final barrier imprisoning this powerful treasure.

"Sliver's Call" is a short adventure for five 2nd-level characters that takes part in the Chaos Scar, near the King's Wall. The characters become entwined in the rivalry of a pair of arcane scholars searching for a long-lost treasure. Both rivals are under the influence of psionic commands from a sliver of the Chaos Meteor that compel them to uncover it.

The wizard Casaubon is on the verge of finding the sliver and hires a group of adventures to help him achieve his destiny. The characters first confront a mercenary force hired by his rival, then come upon her with her warlock associates as they unseal the final barrier imprisoning the sliver. Finally they must contend with the ancient evil as it takes control of their employer.

If you're not playing a Chaos Scar campaign, you can still use this adventure by integrating the Cave of Dark Whispers into any existing campaign, in a stretch of wilderness where a meteorite fragment fell long ago. If you use the adventure somewhere other than the Chaos Scar, you'll need to invent your own explanation for the sliver's malign influence.

For details on the Chaos Scar and its environs, read the [link] Chaos Scar introduction [/link] and check out the map of the entire valley.

Background

The promise of riches and adventure has called many to the Chaos Scar over the centuries, but other voices literally summon the gullible and the greedy with sinister and seductive words.

Five years ago, the half-elf wizard Casaubon heard one of those voices in an unlikely place. While a student at the renowned White Lotus Academy of the arcane arts, the mage stumbled upon a githzerai memory crystal in a forgotten corner of the academy's Lost Secrets Library.

Casaubon read the memory crystal's contents, which described the final days of Xor-Souf, a long-dead githzerai. Xor-Souf had spent the last part of her life chasing a strange meteor streaking through the heavens toward the world—the same one that ultimately carved the Chaos Scar. She knew the cosmic stone was an artifact of evil and rightly feared it, but she was also drawn by its immense power—and by a psionic call issuing from it. As she followed the rock's path, she stayed ever vigilant for a sliver of the main mass—the one issuing the psionic call—to break away. Foolishly, she believed that she could harvest some of the meteor's power from such a shard without succumbing to its evil.

When the meteor made landfall, a fragment did break away to embed itself in the ground not far from the main impact site. The next-to-last memory stored within the crystal was of Xor-Souf landing her planar vessel near the Chaos Scar and leaving it to excavate the shard.

Memory Crystals

These psionic crystals come in many sizes, but none larger than a short sword. Creatures trained in Arcana can access the crystal as a standard action and then scan its memories, much like reading a book. The smallest crystals hold one to ten pages' worth of information; the largest can contain the equivalent of 10,000 pages. Memory crystals can serve as both ritual books and as scrolls.

The crystal's last entry was a disjointed and confusing jumble of emotions and thoughts. Some of them were Xor-Souf's, but others came from an indescribable being wielding potent psionic power. The telepathic voice raged that Xor-Souf was and unsuitable vessel for its gift. It called out to Casaubon by name to come to the Chaos Scar, find the sliver, and claim true power.

A brilliant but flawed scholar, Casaubon was instantly seduced by the sliver's call. Xor-Souf had died hundreds of years before his birth, yet the voice spoke his name. He became convinced he found his true destiny, one written in the stars long ago—maybe even before the Dawn War.

In other words, Casaubon took the first steps toward delusion, obsession, and insanity.

The half-elf academic's obsession with the sliver grew each day. He spent every moment of free time researching the Chaos Scar, Xor-Souf, and the meteor. His studies developed into plans for an expedition, and those grew into a conspiracy with a fellow student—an earthsoul genasi swordmage named Ediza.

Ediza came from a family of means, unlike Casaubon. He struck up a romance of convenience with the genasi, leading her on with the promise of power in return for funds and materiel to supply his expedition. Although he was careful not to share all his secrets with Ediza, in the end Casaubon was the one manipulated. His evasiveness piqued the genasi's curiosity. She eventually found and read Xor-Souf's memory crystal, but the strange voice in the crystal's last entry called her name, not Casaubon's.

This revelation hit Ediza like a punch in the gut. Not only was she being used for her wealth (which she had always suspected), but Casaubon wanted to

cheat her of her rightful destiny. Ediza secretly left the academy and mounted her own expedition to the Chaos Scar. Now, nearly a month later, Casaubon is struggling to catch up to her.

The sliver saw in Casaubon the ideal qualities for a servant but was content to lead Ediza on to hasten its release. Once Casaubon arrives at the excavation site, the sliver moves to embrace its chosen one.

Adventure Synopsis

Casaubon approaches the characters with a plan to explore a site in the Chaos Scar known as the Cave of Dark Whispers.

Outwardly the half-elf seems an eccentric and slightly befuddled wizard looking for some long-lost bit of arcana. Insightful characters might suspect that Casaubon is not being entirely honest about his quest, or even gain a clue as to his true mental state.

If the characters take the job, they accompany the wizard to the Chaos Scar and eventually approach the Cave of Dark Whispers. There they encounter Ediza's mercenaries, who are guarding the excavation. Casaubon urges bloody battle, but if the characters defeat the mercenaries by other means, they can learn more about Ediza, Casaubon, and the history of the cave.

Beyond are the lower ruins, once the temple and base of operations for the long-dead Cult of Dark Whispers, dedicated to the malevolent sliver. The characters find Ediza and a pair of halfling warlocks attempting to open the final seal on the sliver's resting place. Once they open the door, the swordmage and warlocks are aided by sliver wraiths, servants of the whispering shard, but only until the wraiths are destroyed. Then their essence empowers the whispering sliver's true chosen, Casaubon, to help him defeat his rival.

Once the characters reach the inner temple, they are attacked by more wraiths—as well as by Casaubon, who has bonded with the sliver and does not intend to share its power with anyone.

Dungeon Tiles

All of this adventure maps were constructed with one set each of the following **D&D Dungeon Tile** sets: *Halls of the Giant Kings* (DU1), *Caves of Carnage* (DU3), and *Sinister Woods* (DU5).

The map for encounter W1 uses tiles from the *Caves of Carnage* and *Sinister Woods* sets. The maps for encounters W2 and W3 draw on the *Halls of the Giant Kings* and *Caves of Carnage* sets.

Parcel 1: Two *potions of healing* and 190 gp
(carried by Casaubon)
All encounters

Parcel 2: One level 3 magic item
(carried by a mercenary)
Mercenaries at the Mouth

Parcel 3: 100 gp gem (amber) and 70 gp
(carried by a mercenary)
Mercenaries at the Mouth

Parcel 4: One level 5 magic item
(carried by Ediza or one of the warlocks)
The Sealed Doorway

Parcel 5: One 250 gp art object
(buried in the rubble in the old temple)
Call Heeded

Treasure

"Sliver's Call" uses the treasure parcel system described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. The characters should earn a total of five treasure parcels in this adventure. Listed below are the most likely places to find treasure and what each parcel should contain. (When placing magic items, you should consult your players' wish lists, if any).

If appropriate, you can have a monster use a magic item in an encounter, making changes to its stat block as needed to reflect the item's abilities.

Getting Started

"Sliver's Call" starts when the characters meet Casaubon. The circumstances of the meeting depend on the current needs of your campaign. The mage introduces himself.

"I'm Casaubon, a wizard and explorer. I recently finished my apprenticeship and, as a parting gift, my master gave me a scroll detailing the location of an ancient—and likely undisturbed—treasure trove in the Chaos Scar. I hired a group of adventurers to help me procure it, but I was betrayed. Their leader, a treacherous genasi named Ediza, stole the scroll and left me for dead. I seek help to continue searching for the treasure, as well as to get revenge on those who betrayed me. I'm willing to pay well."

Casaubon's behavior can give the characters a clue that the situation is not quite as it seems.

Insight DC 12
The wizard fidgets and looks away when he talks about Ediza and her treachery. You get the impression that he's holding something back.

Arcana DC17
In addition to fidgeting, Casaubon exhibits odd tics that suggest symptoms of prolonged psionic suggestion. Such exposure often causes insanity, usually in the form of delusions of grandeur, but it can manifest as full-blown sociopathic behavior.

If the characters ask for any payment up front, Casaubon tries to delay them. In truth, he is broke and has been for weeks, though he has some residuum and alchemical reagents at his disposal. (Over the years spent studying the memory crystal and planning the expedition, he carefully stole small quantities of ritual components from the academy's stores.) Since Ediza's betrayal, Casaubon has been using the Fool's Gold ritual (*Arcane Power*, page 155) to fund the more expensive parts of his expedition, traveling in disguise to different towns so as to avoid pursuit by bilked merchants. He has 50 gp worth of ritual components left, which he can use to create 500 gp of illusory gold. Since the ritual takes only a minute, and the fake gold lasts for only 4 hours, the wizard prefers to hand it over only after reaching the Cave of Dark Whispers. He insists on accompanying the party to the excavation site.

With a successful DC 24 Arcana or Perception check, a character can identify the gold as false.

Casaubon

Casaubon is not unattractive, but he is by no means handsome. A tall and lanky man with dark blond hair, curly on top and shorn at the sides, he is often sullen, sometimes terse. The wizard wears long blue robes and usually keeps his face hidden under a voluminous hood. He displays a number of strange physical habits, such as twiddling his fingers and rubbing his face.

Though he insists on coming along, Casaubon does not participate in encounters unless forced. The wizard stays at the back of the party, providing light and verbal guidance, but he stays out of combat unless the characters get into serious trouble. In such a circumstance, he provides token spellcasting (typically *magic missile* or *misdirected mark*), but if the situation gets too hot, he uses *expeditious retreat* to flee, returning only when the coast is clear.

Digging Deeper

The characters might not trust Casaubon, especially if they notice his odd behavior. The unexplained holes in his story and his insistence on coming along should be red flags. Cautious characters might research Casaubon or the excavation site to learn more about both before they join the wizard's expedition.

Before they leave town, the PCs can ask the locals about the cave and its history. Townsfolk point them to the shrine of Ioun, the god of knowledge, skill, and prophecy.

Scribers of Ioun

The shrine is little more than a small library tucked into an alleyway near the town's marketplace. It is run by two aged human brothers named Peer and Poul Revet. Identical twins, the two are hard to tell apart. Both have shaggy gray hair tucked under scriber's caps; they wear the same color, style, and cut of robes; and they speak in the same low grumble. The only obvious difference between them is in the style of the handlebar mustaches that both affect: Peer wears his curled upward, while Poul's curls down.

Casaubon	**Level 3 Elite Controller**
Medium natural humanoid, half-elf	XP 300
Initiative +2	**Senses** Perception +0; low-light vision
HP 88; **Bloodied** 44	
AC 18; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 14	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 6	
Action Points 1	
Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+8 vs. AC; 1d4 + 1 damage.	
Magic Missile (standard; at-will) ✦ **Force, Implement**	
Ranged 20; +6 vs. Reflex; 3d4 + 4 force damage.	
Misdirected Mark (standard; encounter) ✦ **Implement**	
Ranged 10; +7 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target is marked by an ally of Casaubon's choice within 5 squares of him until the end of his next turn.	
Light (minor; at-will)	
Ranged 5; targets one object or unoccupied square; the target sheds bright light that fills the square and all squares within 4 squares of it. The light lasts 5 minutes and can be put out with a free action. Casaubon can have only one light active at a time.	
Maze of Mirrors (standard; encounter) ✦ **Illusion, Implement**	
Area burst 1 within 10; + 6 vs. Will; until the end of Casaubon's next turn, the target is immobilized and takes a -4 to attack rolls.	
Expeditious Retreat (move; encounter)	
Casaubon shifts twice his speed.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Draconic
Skills Arcana +10, Bluff +6, History +10	
Str 11 (+1)	**Dex** 13 (+2) **Wis** 9 (+0)
Con 12 (+2)	**Int** 18 (+5) **Cha** 16 (+4)
Equipment robes, dagger, wand, spellbook	

The twins can provide some useful information in response to the characters' inquiries. They frequently interrupt each other, each finishing the other's sentences as though sharing his thoughts.

What can you tell me about Casaubon?

"We have heard the name. An earthsoul genasi woman warned us he might be coming this way. We think they are rivals or maybe more–" one adds with a wink–"if you know what I mean."

What did Ediza want?

"She came in looking for information about the Cave of Dark Whispers. We warned her about its danger, but we don't think she was listening. It is a terrible place better left alone."

What is the Cave of Dark Whispers?

The brothers let out a sigh in unison. "Long ago, before we were born, the cave was home to a cult that revered a whispering thing said to dwell in its depths. At the cult's height, half the town was under its sway. Its sole purpose seemed to be to locate some 'chosen one.' Eventually the enemies of the cult crushed it and caved in its subterranean temple, but some folk say they can still hear dark whispers from beneath the earth. The cave is dangerous and should remain buried."

If the characters ask for advice, the brothers suggest finding out what the wizard is up to. If Casaubon or Ediza plans to uncover the Cave of Dark Whispers, finding out why might let the characters halt any threat that might be awakened. Such research might involve retracing the wizard's movements, which could reveal the existence of the memory crystal and its disappearance from the academy's library.

Approaching the Cave of Dark Whispers

Casaubon leads the characters to the ruins at the mouth of the cave. The area is guarded by a group of Ediza's mercenaries.

At the far end of the clearing, crumbling walls front a cliff face. Strange symbols are carved into the weathered gray stone of the ruins. Beyond is a recently excavated cave mouth, its newly cleared passage stabilized by wooden scaffolding.

In front of the cave mouth sits a motley group of five humans eating around a fire. Most wear simple leather jerkins and carry maces, but one large lout is clad in bear furs and hefts a greataxe over his shoulder. He bullies the others aside to grab chunks of venison.

Above the humans, a cloak-garbed dwarf perches atop a ruined wall, watching the clearing with a loaded crossbow at his side. His gray clothing and skin almost blend into the crumbling stonework.

"They are the genasi's hirelings. We must kill them," Casaubon whispers.

If the characters question the wizard's bloodthirsty suggestion, he attempts to sway them with wild stories of Ediza's treachery. His claims are largely fictional but, in his madness, he has convinced himself they are true. A DC 14 Insight check allows a character to recognize the wizard's fabrications.

Tactical Encounter: W1. Mercenaries at the Mouth (page 14).

Beyond the cave mouth is a 100-foot-long winding tunnel, scaffolding lining its walls. The passage ends at a steep flight of stairs descending to the lower temple complex.

A DC 12 Perception check reveals signs of a larger labor camp not far from the entrance ruins. The camp was home to two dozen laborers camped there until very recently.

Finding Ediza

Beyond the stairs, the characters find the gateway to the inner sanctum of the Cult of Dark Whispers. The temple has been blocked by cave-ins for a century, and Ediza's team broke through the last barrier only a few days ago. Since then, she and her warlock assistants have been working to defeat the arcane seals on a door guarding the inner chamber, where the sliver lies. They are on the verge of doing so.

Little do the excavators know that their actions will release the remnants of souls ensnared by the shard that now seek to merge with its chosen servant.

Tactical Encounter: W2. The Sealed Doorway (page 16).

The Whispering Temple

Once the inner chamber has been breached, the characters have to deal with the power of the sliver and its servants, as well as an empowered Casaubon intent on keeping its power to himself.

Tactical Encounter: W3. Call Heeded (page 19).

W1. Mercenaries at the Mouth

Encounter Level 5 (XP 1,100)

Setup

4 human bandits (H)
1 human berserker (B)
1 dwarf bolter (D)
2 gnome skulks (G)

The gnome skulks start hidden behind the crumbling walls. Do not place them on the map until they attack or a character notices them.

Perception DC 17
You catch a slight movement among the ruins from the corner of your eye. Small cloaked figures raising hand crossbows lurk amid the crumbling stone.

The mercenaries have been warned by Ediza that a wizard matching Casaubon's description might try to disrupt the excavation. They're also worried because they have not heard from the expedition's leader for some time. They are ready to defend themselves, but only to a point.

Tactics

The mercenaries know the importance of a fortified position and take advantage of their superior terrain.

The humans start the battle behind the cover of the central collapsed wall. They throw daggers and handaxes at enemies in an attempt to draw them through the bottleneck, where the berserker lunges to attack. Once the characters close, the bandits use the terrain to gain combat advantage wherever possible.

The gnome skulks stay in fortified positions behind the walls, allowing the humans to draw enemies into the courtyard. They fire hand crossbows with combat advantage until melee is joined, then use *fade away* to disengage.

The dwarf bolter fires down from atop the ruined wall, preferring to target enemies that don't have cover. He has anchored himself to the wall with a leather strap, strengthening the effect of his *stand your ground* ability.

Dwarf Bolter (D) **Level 4 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid XP 175
Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception +8; low-light vision
HP 46; **Bloodied** 23
AC 17; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 14
Saving Throws +5 against poison effects
Speed 5
⊕ **Warhammer** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+8 vs. AC; 1d10 + 2 damage.
➢ **Crossbow** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 15/30; +10 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage.
Aimed Shot
With ranged attacks against creatures that don't have cover, the dwarf bolter gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls and deals 1d6 extra damage on a hit.
Stand Your Ground
When a dwarf is pulled, pushed, or slid, it can move 1 fewer squares. When an attack would knock the dwarf prone, it makes a saving throw to remain standing. See also *stabilizing restraints*.
Stabilizing Restraints
The dwarf bolter reduces forced movement by 2 squares instead of 1 and gains a +2 bonus to saving throws against any effect that would knock it prone. However, it is also immobilized. The bolter can release the restraints by taking a minor action.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Dwarven
Skills Dungeoneering +10, Endurance +7
Str 14 (+4) **Dex** 16 (+5) **Wis** 12 (+3)
Con 16 (+5) **Int** 11 (+2) **Cha** 10 (+2)
Equipment chainmail, warhammer, crossbow with 20 bolts, leather strap

4 Human Bandits (H) **Level 2 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid XP 125 each
Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +1
HP 37; **Bloodied** 18
AC 16; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12
Speed 6
⊕ **Mace** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+4 vs. AC; 1d8 + 1 damage, and the human bandit shifts 1 square.
➢ **Dagger** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 5/10; +6 vs. AC; 1d4 + 3 damage.
↯ **Dazing Strike** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**
+4 vs. AC; 1d8 + 1 damage, the target is dazed until the end of the bandit's next turn, and the bandit shifts 1 square.
Combat Advantage
The bandit deals 1d6 extra damage with melee and ranged attacks against any creature granting combat advantage to it.
Alignment Any **Languages** Common
Skills Stealth +9, Streetwise +7, Thievery +9
Str 12 (+2) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 11 (+1)
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 12 (+2)
Equipment leather armor, mace, 4 daggers

Human Berserker (B) **Level 4 Brute**
Medium natural humanoid XP 175
Initiative +3 **Senses** Perception +2
HP 66; **Bloodied** 33; see also *battle fury*
AC 15; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 14
Speed 7
⊕ **Greataxe** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+7 vs. AC; 1d12 + 4 damage (crit 1d12 + 16).
↯ **Battle Fury** (free, when first bloodied; encounter)
The human berserker makes a melee basic attack with a +4 bonus to the attack roll and deals 1d6 extra damage on a hit.
➢ **Handaxe** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 5/10; +5 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.
Alignment Any **Languages** Common
Skills Athletics +9, Endurance +9
Str 17 (+5) **Dex** 12 (+3) **Wis** 11 (+2)
Con 16 (+5) **Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 12 (+3)
Equipment hide armor, greataxe, 2 handaxes

2 Gnome Skulks (G)	Level 2 Lurker
Small fey humanoid	XP 125 each
Initiative +8	**Senses** Perception +2; low-light vision
HP 34; **Bloodied** 17	
AC 16; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12	
Speed 5	
War Pick (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+7 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage (crit 1d8 + 11).	
Hand Crossbow (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
Ranged 10/20; +7 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.	
Combat Advantage	
The gnome skulk deals 1d6 extra damage with melee and ranged attacks against any creature granting combat advantage to it.	
Fade Away (immediate reaction, when the gnome skulk takes damage; encounter) ✦ **Illusion**	
The gnome skulk turns invisible until it attacks or until the end of its next turn.	
Reactive Stealth	
If a gnome has cover or concealment when it makes an initiative check at the start of an encounter, it can make a Stealth check to become hidden.	
Shadow Skulk	
A hidden gnome skulk that misses with a melee or a ranged attack remains hidden.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Arcana +10, Stealth +11, Thievery +9	
Str 8 (+0)	**Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 16 (+4)	**Int** 14 (+3) **Cha** 13 (+2)
Equipment leather armor, war pick, hand crossbow with 20 bolts	

Surrender Is an Option

Ediza has paid the mercenaries well to this point, but her long absence has softened their resolve. For purposes of Intimidate checks to compel surrender, the bandits, bolter, and skulks are considered unfriendly (+5 Will defense modifier), and the berserker is hostile (+10 Will defense modifier).

Development

Characters taking a closer look at the strange markings on the ruined walls notice a repetition of symbols related to Ihbar, a dark nebula revered by some star pact warlocks.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Daylight illuminates the area. The mercenaries' campfire sheds bright light if they are encountered at night.

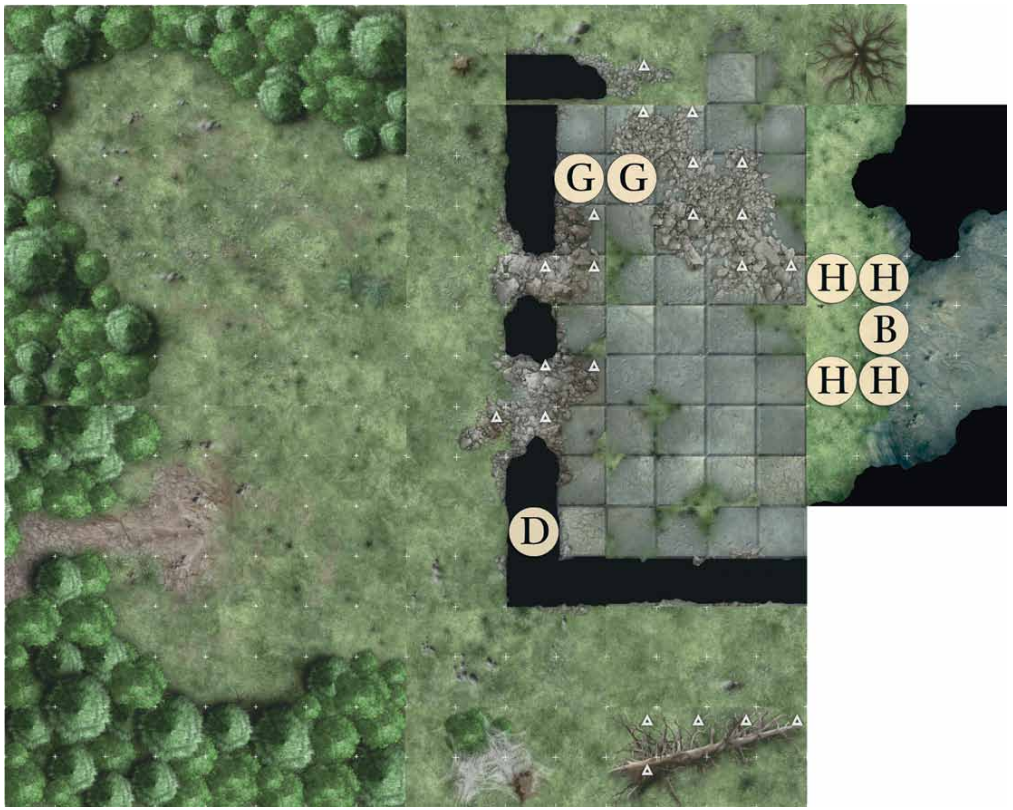
Campfire (Night Only): Any creature that enters or starts its turn in the campfire's square takes 1d6 fire damage.

Fallen Tree: A large tree has fallen to the side of the cliff. It provides cover, and its squares are difficult terrain.

Forest: Squares containing forest are difficult terrain and provide cover.

Rubble: Piles of rubble from the excavation litter the area. Squares containing rubble are difficult terrain.

Ruined Walls: The walls are 10 feet tall and 5 feet wide. A creature can climb to the top of a wall with a DC 20 Athletics check. It can walk along the top, treating those squares as difficult terrain.



W2. The Sealed Doorway

Encounter Level 3 (XP 750)

These lower ruins once served as temple to the Cult of Dark Whispers. Rocks are piled almost to the ceiling, nearly blocking the passage to the chamber beyond. The characters can make their way through, getting a glimpse of the activity inside as they do so.

Setup

Ediza, genasi swordmage (E)
Jargo (J) and Reymol (R), halfling star pact warlocks
2 sliver wraith seekers

Do not place the sliver wraiths on the battle map initially. They are released once the seal is broken (see below).

When the characters get a look at the cleared chamber, read:

A pair of male halflings in robes—one bald, the other with short-cropped silver hair— intently study a large, iron-bound double door at the far end of the chamber. Behind them a female earthsoul genasi paces nervously.

The warlocks are having some difficulty with the last seal, but Jargo (the silver-haired halfling) is on the verge of cracking it.

Arcana or Religion DC 15
The halflings are studying a mass of melted silver, engraved with Supernal hieroglyphics, that seals the two doors together. Traces of six similar seals, now broken, line the seam between the doors. This last one appears to be giving the pair trouble.

If the characters hesitate, do not make their presence known, or wait to see what is going on, read:

"Eureka! I finally have it!" The silver-haired halfling shrieks. He then mumbles an arcane phrase, and the silver seal warps and cracks.

Reymol (R) and Jargo (J) **Level 1 Artillery**
Small natural humanoid, halfling XP 100 each

Initiative +3 **Senses** Perception +5
HP 31; **Bloodied** 15
AC 18; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 14
Saving Throws +5 against fear effects
Speed 6

⊕ **Dagger** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+6 vs. AC; 1d4 damage.

⊗ **Eldritch Blast** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Implement**
Ranged 10; +6 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 3 damage.

Dire Radiance (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fear, Implement, Radiant**
Ranged 10; +6 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 +3 radiant damage, and if the target moves closer to this character on its next turn, it takes 1d6 +3 extra damage.

Arms of Hadar (standard; encounter) ✦ **Implement**
Close burst 2; +6 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the target is pushed 4 squares.

Second Chance (immediate interrupt, when hit by an attack; encounter)
The attacker must reroll the triggering attack and take the new result.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Skills Arcana +8, Thievery +7
Str 10 (+0) **Dex** 14 (+2) **Wis** 10 (+0)
Con 14 (+2) **Int** 16 (+3) **Cha** 16 (+3)
Equipment leather armor, dagger, rod

Ediza (E) **Level 2 Elite Soldier**
Medium elemental humanoid (earth), genasi XP 250

Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception +2
HP 74; **Bloodied** 37
AC 18; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 14
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

⊕ **Longsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+9 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage.

Swordsnare (standard; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**
+9 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of Ediza's next turn. Ediza can use this power in place of a melee basic attack when charging or using her *aegis of assault*.

Lightning Lure (standard; at-will) ✦ **Implement, Lightning**
Ranged 3; +7 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 6 damage and Ediza pulls the target 3 squares to a square adjacent to her.

Sword Burst (standard; at-will) ✦ **Implement, Force**
Close burst 1; +7 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 6 force damage.

Aegis of Assault (minor; at-will) ✦ **Teleportation**
Close burst 2; no attack roll; Ediza marks the target, and the target remains marked until Ediza uses this power on another creature or this mark is superseded by another mark. If a creature marked by this power makes an attack that does not include Ediza, is within 10 squares of Ediza, and hits the creature with the that attack, Ediza can, as an immediate reaction, teleport to a square adjacent to that creature, and make a melee basic attack against it.

Earthshock (minor; encounter)
Close burst 1; targets enemies in burst touching the ground; +7 vs. Fortitude; the target is knocked prone.

Mythal Recovery (minor; encounter)
Ediza makes a saving throw against one effect that a save can end.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Primordial
Skills Arcana +9
Str 17 (+4) **Dex** 14 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 16 (+4) **Cha** 13 (+2)
Equipment leather armor, longsword, githzerai memory crystal

2 Sliver Wraith Seekers (S)		Level 3 Controller
Medium aberrant humanoid (undead)		XP 150 each
Hypnotic Form (Charm) aura 2; each enemy that ends its turn in the aura is slowed and takes a –2 penalty to Will until the end of its next turn.		
Initiative +4	**Senses** Perception +2	
HP 31; **Bloodied** 15		
AC 15; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 14		
Immune dazed, disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic, insubstantial		
Speed fly 6 (hover); phasing		
⊕ **Maddening Touch** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic** +5 vs. Will; 1d6 + 2 psychic damage, and the target is knocked prone and can't stand up (save ends).		
⇦ **Seeker's Calling** (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Psychic** Close burst 5; targets one creature in burst; +5 vs. Will; 2d6 + 2 psychic damage and the seeker slides the target 5 squares to a square either adjacent to the seeker or within its *hypnotic form* aura.		
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Deep Speech	
Str 6 (-1)	**Dex** 17 (+4)	**Wis** 13 (+2)
Con 14 (+3)	**Int** 10 (+1)	**Cha** 15 (+3)

Tactics

When the PCs make themselves known, Ediza moves to block them so that the halflings can continue working on the seal. She marks defenders or strikers in the group, and uses her *lightning lure* to pull in a leader or a controller (targeting Casaubon if possible). Her first priority is protecting the halflings; after they have opened the seal, she fights to the death, dealing as much damage as possible to all who dare get between her and her perceived destiny.

If the characters attack before the halflings have opened the final seal, they both continue their efforts as long as they are protected. Each round, each halfling adjacent to the door can attempt a DC 15 Arcana check as a standard action. On a success, the seal breaks. Once they are free to join the fight, the warlocks use *dire radiance* and *arms of Hadar* to support Ediza and keep the characters at a distance.

Once the seal is broken, the sliver wraiths phase through the door and scream into the room. They attack only the characters, apparently to aid Ediza.

Casaubon keeps out of the fight for the most part, although he takes action to defend himself against attacks from Ediza or the warlocks.

Sliver Wraiths and Casaubon

The wraiths' real goal is to fall in battle and have their dying essence meld with Casaubon, who has been chosen by the sliver.

When a sliver wraith drops to 0 hit points, read the following:

The strange wraith implodes into a mote of purplish light that streaks toward Casaubon, striking him square in the chest. The wizard stumbles at the impact but seems unhurt.

Each time a sliver wraith dies and merges with Casaubon, it grants the wizard a benefit. These benefits might not have much effect as long as Casaubon avoids combat but become much more important in the final encounter. In addition, each sliver that merges with Casaubon counts toward his ultimate transformation (see page 19).

Features of the Area

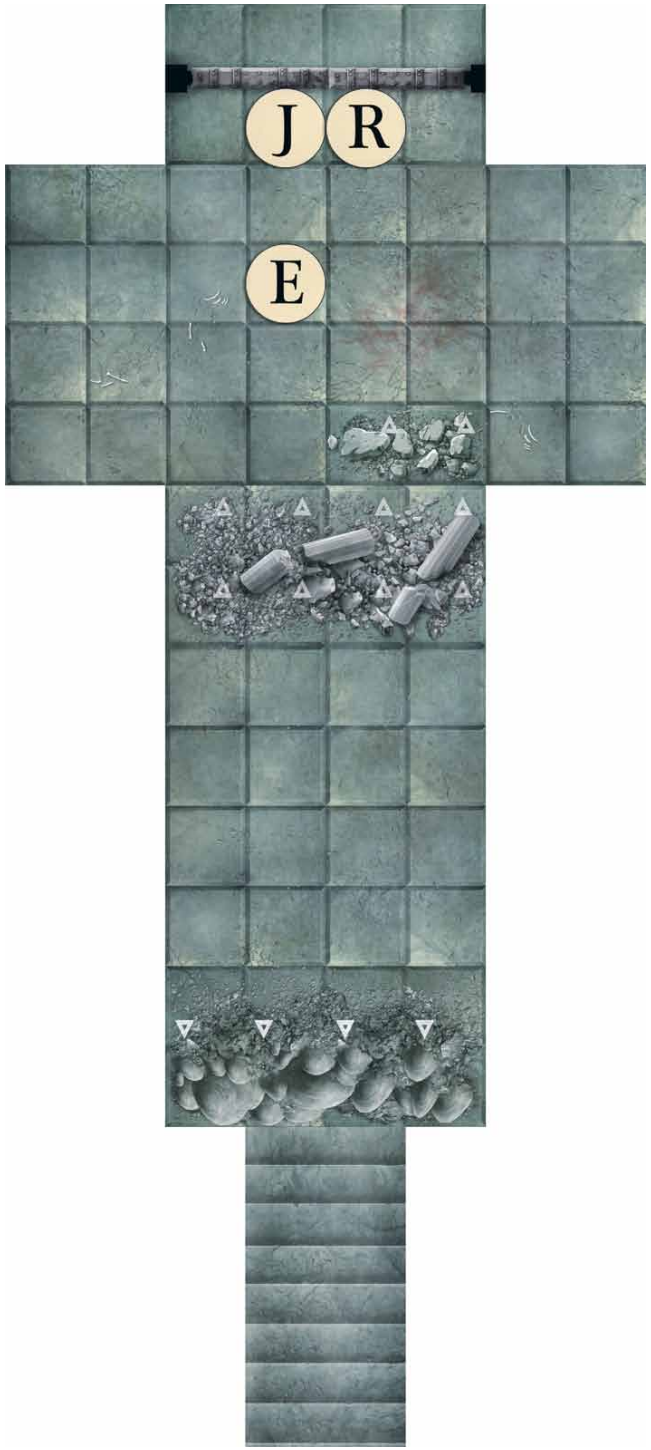
Ceiling: 10 feet high.

Illumination: The excavators' lanterns shed bright light that fills the chamber.

Fallen Rocks: Rocks fill the 2-square-wide area directly in front of the stairs. A character must climb up the rocks (Athletics DC 5), squeeze through the space they occupy, and then drop 8 feet to enter the main chamber. A creature gains cover while squeezing in squares filled with rocks.

Rubble: These squares are difficult terrain.

Sealed Door: The door is impossible to open, and the sliver wraiths cannot pass through, until all the seals have been defeated. If the halflings do not break the seal, the PCs can attempt to do so. This is a complexity 1 skill challenge (4 successes before 3 failures) requiring DC 15 Religion or Arcana checks as standard actions while adjacent to the door. On a failure, all creatures within 5 squares of the door lose a healing surge. A failed skill challenge can be retried.



Development

After Ediza is defeated, Casaubon searches her body and tries to pocket the memory crystal (Perception DC 12 to notice). If a character manages to retrieve the crystal and access its stored memories, he or she experiences the same thing that Casaubon and Ediza did. However, the psionic voice calls the character's name instead. Again, the sliver seeks release by any agent but prefers to merge with Casaubon as soon as the opportunity arises.

W3. Call Heeded

Encounter Level 4 (XP 975)

Setup

3 sliver wraith guardians (G)
2 sliver wraith seekers (S)

Once the doors are unsealed, Casaubon is eager to enter the inner temple where rests the object he seeks. It lies in the bottom of a pit dug though the years by the destructive energy of its own malice.

The sliver is guarded by a pair of sliver wraith seekers and a trio of sliver wraith guardians. As in the previous chamber, the wraiths try to merge with Casaubon. After three of them do so (including those from the outer chamber), he is transformed into an aberrant servant of the sliver.

When Casaubon is transformed, read:

The wizard screams and falls to his knees; his hands clutch his head in pain. Then his right hand stretches grotesquely and begins to bubble with violet pustules, transforming within moments into a sickly purple tentacle. When the transformation is complete, the wizard rises, his eyes aglow with a weird green luminescence. He smiles wickedly.

"Fools! The sliver is mine," he hisses. "And I will share its power with no one."

Tactics

The sliver wraiths dart forth to attack the characters. As in the outer chamber, they leave Casaubon alone until they are destroyed, then try to merge with him.

The seekers hover near or on the aberrant circles, hoping to lure characters into them with *seeker's calling*. By keeping them in range of their *hypnotic form* auras, the wraiths force the characters to provoke opportunity attacks if they try to leave a circle. The guardians protect the seekers, marking characters snared by *seeker's calling*.

Whenever a sliver wraith drops to 0 hit points, its essence melds with Casaubon. Once he has transformed, the wizard enters the fray on the wraiths' side. He attempts to grab one character with his *tentacle arm* while hurling spells at the others.

3 Sliver Wraith Guardians (G) Level 2 Soldier
Medium aberrant humanoid (undead) XP 125 each

Hypnotic Form (Charm) aura 2; each enemy that ends its turn in the aura is slowed and takes a -2 penalty to Will until the end of its next turn.
Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +2
HP 26; **Bloodied** 13
AC 16; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13
Immune dazed, disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic, insubstantial
Speed fly 6 (hover); phasing

Dizzying Touch (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
+5 vs. Will; 1d6 + 2 psychic damage, and the target is marked and grants combat advantage until the end of the guardian's next turn.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Deep Speech
Str 6 (-1) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 13 (+2)
Con 14 (+3) **Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 15 (+3)

2 Sliver Wraith Seekers (S) Level 3 Controller
Medium aberrant humanoid (undead) XP 150 each

Hypnotic Form (Charm) aura 2; each enemy that ends its turn in the aura is slowed and takes a -2 penalty to Will until the end of its next turn.
Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +2
HP 31; **Bloodied** 15
AC 15; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 14
Immune dazed, disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic, insubstantial
Speed fly 6 (hover); phasing

Maddening Touch (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
+5 vs. Will; 1d6 + 2 psychic damage, and the target is knocked prone and can't stand up (save ends).

Seeker's Calling (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Psychic**
Close burst 5; targets one creature in burst; +5 vs. Will; 2d6 + 2 psychic damage and the seeker slides the target 5 squares to a square either adjacent to the seeker or within its *hypnotic form* aura.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Deep Speech
Str 6 (-1) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 13 (+2)
Con 14 (+3) **Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 15 (+3)

Casaubon, Sliver's Servant Level 3 Elite Controller
Medium aberrant humanoid, half-elf XP 300

Initiative +2 **Senses** Perception +0; low-light vision
HP 88; **Bloodied** 44
AC 18; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 14
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

Tentacle Arm (standard; only while not grabbing a creature; at-will)
Reach 2; +8 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage and the target is grabbed. The target does not need to be adjacent to Casaubon for him to sustain the grab, but must be within Casaubon's reach. Casaubon can have only one creature grabbed at a time.

Magic Missile (standard; at-will) ✦ **Force, Implement**
Ranged 20; +6 vs. Reflex; 3d4 + 4 force damage.

Soul Drain (standard; only while grabbing a creature; encounter)
+6 vs. Fortitude; targets the grabbed creature; the target is dazed (save ends) and loses 1 healing surge.

Misdirected Mark (standard; encounter) ✦ **Implement**
Ranged 10; +7 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the target is marked by an ally of Casaubon's choice within 5 squares of him until the end of his next turn.

Maze of Mirrors (standard; encounter) ✦ **Illusion, Implement**
Area burst 1 within 10; + 6 vs. Will; until the end of Casaubon's next turn, the target is immobilized and takes a -4 penalty to attack rolls.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Draconic
Skills Arcana +10, Bluff +6, History +10
Str 17 (+4) **Dex** 13 (+2) **Wis** 9 (+0)
Con 12 (+2) **Int** 18 (+5) **Cha** 16 (+4)
Equipment robes, dagger, wand, spellbook

Features of the Area

Ceiling: 10 feet high.

Illumination: The aberrant circles glow with eldritch power, dimly lighting the area.

Aberrant Circles: Any nonaberrant creature that ends its turn in a circle is dazed until the end of its next turn.

Rocks: Squares containing rocks are blocking terrain.

Rubble: These squares are difficult terrain.

Pit and Sliver: The pit is 15 feet deep, and at its bottom is the meteorite sliver. This black metal shard is about 2 feet long and radiates malignance. When any creature other than Casaubon ends its turn holding or carrying the shard, it takes 15 psychic damage.

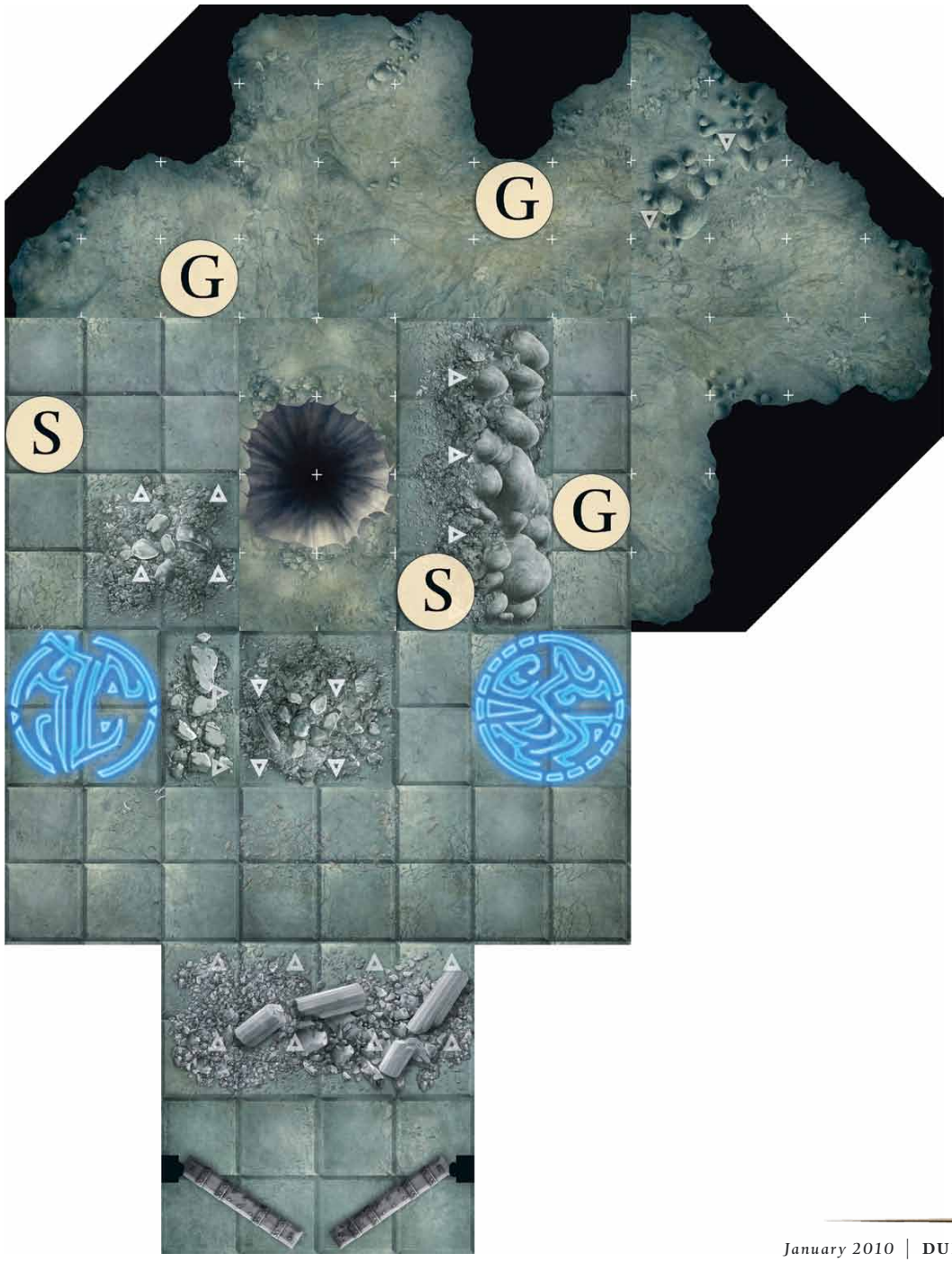
Development

Once the characters defeat Casaubon, they have to figure out what to do with the sliver. It's too dangerous to move, but given enough time and with help, they should be able to collapse the cavern once more. The party might also seek out arcane specialists or priests to reseal the temple's entrance.

About the Author

Born on a stormy Christmas day, in our nation's capital, during the Nixon administration, the stars were definitely wrong when **Stephen Radney-MacFarland** came screaming into the world. Spending most of his impressionable years as a vagabond and ne're-do-well, Stephen eventually settled in the Northwest to waste his life on roleplaying games.

Stephen teaches a class on roleplaying design for the Art Institute of Seattle, molding the minds of young and upcoming designers. Be afraid. Be very afraid.



Test of Fire

By Scott Fitzgerald Gray

illustration by William O'Connor
cartography by Mike Schley

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"You call yourselves heroes? You claim greatness? Prove it to those who survived the Dawn Wars of gods and primordials. Prove it before the lords of fire and chaos. Prove in this Crucible Court of the City of Brass that you are worthy of the allegiance of the efreets!"

SCALES OF WAR™

In "Test of Fire," the heroes are tasked by the reborn Bahamut with infiltrating Tiamat's last stronghold in the planes—the legendary City of Brass. There, the heroes must engage a formidable efreet noble in a risky alliance, then square off against the Lord of the Efreets and the blue exarch of Tiamat in a city under siege.

"Test of Fire" is an adventure for five characters midway through 27th level. By the end of the adventure, the characters should have attained 29th level. This adventure is the penultimate chapter of the Scales of War adventure path, following the events of "Those Once Loyal." This assault on the City of Brass can be adapted for use in other epic tier campaigns with a bit of effort.

BACKGROUND

For untold centuries, the Dragon Queen Tiamat has labored on a deadly mission—the permanent destruction of her soul-sibling and nemesis Bahamut, the Platinum Dragon. Tiamat's plans came to light in the mortal realm by virtue of her alliances with the githyanki. In the end, even the greatest of the heroes who turned the tide of the githyanki invasion of the world were unable to prevent Tiamat's foul plots from claiming the Platinum Dragon's life.

All was not lost, however, for Bahamut is wise and farseeing. To prevent Tiamat's ultimate revenge, he installed a fragment of his own essence into the deva Amyria. Through this fragment and the bravery of the heroes, Bahamut has been reborn at the Bridge of al-Sihal on Celestia. Tiamat's forces, emboldened by the Platinum Dragon's apparent demise, are reeling from this sudden reversal of fortune. Tiamat's plans for cosmic dominion have been shattered, but the Dragon Queen is far from helpless.

In a last-ditch effort to win its campaign against the forces of good, half of Tiamat's remaining army has been sent to hold her final redoubt in the planes—the legendary City of Brass. By virtue of foul rituals and dark pacts undertaken with Bashumgarda, the Lord of the Efreets, the Dragon Queen has bolstered her draconic servants with elemental power that may yet turn the tide of war in her favor.

Bahamut's forces have already surrounded the city, but the combined defenses of Tiamat and the efreets will not be easily broken. The Platinum Dragon's servants, however, have made contact with efreet factions within the city that might be turned against Bashumgarda. Even now, the other half of Tiamat's army attempts to enter the Elemental Chaos in order to attack Bahamut's force. Bahamut's magic has sealed off the City of Brass, but it cannot do so for long. Against this dark deadline, it is up to the characters to infiltrate the besieged city and negotiate an alliance with the efreet noble Estumishu. The heroes must then make their way across a city preparing for all-out war to find and kill Bashumgarda in order to win the allegiance of the efreets. Unknown to the characters is the fact that Tiamat's blue exarch Namissi, not Bashumgarda, is the true power in the besieged City of Brass. The adventurers' mission in the fabled city will push them to their limits.

THE QUESTS

In "Test of Fire," the heroes must infiltrate the besieged City of Brass by way of the deadly warren of ruins known as the Keening Delve. Once inside the city, their mission from Bahamut is to negotiate an alliance with the capricious efreet noble Estumishu. In order to obtain Estumishu's favor and open the City of Brass to Bahamut's forces, the characters must slay Bashumgarda, the renegade Lord of Efreets. The real power in the city, however, is Tiamat's blue exarch Namissi, who emerges for a final showdown as Bahamut's forces attack.

Major Quest—Infiltrate the City of Brass
The City of Brass is sealed behind powerful magical wards laid down by Tiamat's ritualists. Bahamut's forces cannot attack until the seals are opened to them. The adventurers must follow the deadly paths of the Keening Delve in order to gain secret access to the city.
Reward: 55,000 XP.

Major Quest—Open the Gates to Bahamut's Forces
After treating with Estumishu, the party must chart a dangerous path through the City of Brass to where Bashumgarda, Lord of Efreets, holds court. Only after Bashumgarda is put down can the characters seize control of the magical wards protecting the city as a prelude to Bahamut's assault.
Reward: 65,000 XP.

Major Quest—See Tiamat's Armies Routed
As Bahamut's forces crash against Tiamat's defenders in the City of Brass, the heroes must do battle against the Dragon Queen's blue exarch. Only when their leader is destroyed can Tiamat's forces be broken and their threat ended.
Reward: 65,000 XP.

Adventure Synopsis

"Test of Fire" begins in the aftermath of the events of "Those Once Loyal." Bahamut has been restored to life by the sacrifice of Amyria, and Tiamat's plans to break the power of the fallen god have been dealt a crippling blow.

As the adventure opens, the characters have returned to Sayre to rest, recuperate, and mourn Amyria's sacrifice. From there, they are summoned to Bahamut's side in the Crystal Tear, an astral dominion from which Bahamut directs his reenergized forces. The Platinum Dragon lays out the scope of Tiamat's failure and her dark hope to turn this near-defeat into victory.

The City of Brass is Tiamat's last stronghold in the planes. It is held by arrangement with Bashumgarda, Lord of Efreets. Bahamut's force has the city surrounded but cannot break in. Tiamat's remaining legions are attempting to return to the Elemental Chaos to attack Bahamut's force. The full brunt of Tiamat's armies, energized with elemental power, will be too much for Bahamut's army to withstand.

Bahamut enlists the characters to infiltrate the City of Brass by way of a secret portal hidden deep in the Keening Delve. This legendary and deadly warren of caverns and ruined chambers is set within the basalt plate on which the City of Brass is built. After entering the city, the heroes meet with Estumishu, an efreet noble who represents factions seeking to overthrow Bashumgarda because of his foul alliance with the Dragon Queen. Estumishu offers his allegiance only if the characters find and kill Bashumgarda—a deadly quest that requires the heroes to undertake a dangerous pilgrimage across a city under siege.

After slaying Bashumgarda, the adventurers must drop the magical wards which protect the city and prevent Bahamut's forces from attacking. At the Eternal Flame Pavilion, the heroes face off against the protectors of the shrine of the Fire Lord Imix, which has been corrupted by Tiamat's foul rituals so as to grant power to the Dragon Queen's servants.

Then the unthinkable happens. The reborn Bahamut, fighting Tiamat's blue exarch Namissi, is struck down in a titanic battle that shatters the great Charcoal Palace. Only the heroes can stand against the blue exarch in the end.

What Is an Adventure Path?

An adventure path is a connected series of adventures that comprises an entire D&D campaign, from the heroes' humble beginnings at 1st level to their epic triumphs at the pinnacle of level 30. These adventures cover all three tiers of play: heroic, paragon, and epic. Each tier is covered by roughly six adventures, meaning that the entire adventure path consists of eighteen adventures. Each adventure covers between one and three levels, but the adventurers can undertake side quests to supplement their XP. This assures that the heroes are the correct level to tackle each adventure.

"Test of Fire" is the penultimate adventure in the Scales of War. It brings the characters into Bahamut's confidence and sets up the climactic confrontation between the heroes and Tiamat which will conclude the final chapter.

Adapting the Adventure

"Test of Fire" is designed for five adventurers but can be easily adapted for larger or smaller groups. Simply add or subtract treasure parcels and monsters using the guidelines presented in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. The Keening Delve is a chaotic warren haunted by ancient magic and foul creatures, and any type of elemental-themed monster or hazard can be placed there. The City of Brass is a thriving metropolis within the Elemental Chaos. The adventure is already set up with encounter groups that play a part in the characters' attempts to move within the city (see Encounter B2, page 43). These can be used to add additional creatures to existing encounters.

This adventure is designed for characters partway through 27th level. Be wary of sending lower-level parties against the challenges of the Keening Delve and the City of Brass. The Keening Delve contains plenty of space for expansion, and you are encouraged to add encounters to the delve if you need to bring a lower-level group up to speed. The heroes should be 28th level (or close to it) when they meet with Estumishu in Encounter B1.

Preparing for Adventure

This adventure begins in the downtime immediately after the characters' previous adventure, "Those Once Loyal." Go to Part One: The Summons of Bahamut (page 15) when you are ready to begin.

What You Need to Play

This adventure contains everything you need to play, including background information, setup, encounters, and maps. You might wish to review any appropriate Dungeons & Dragons® 4th Edition rules before play begins.

You need only read the opening sections of the adventure—the introduction and the encounters in the Keening Delve—to begin play. The encounters within the delve make up a good single session's play, or they can be expanded into a larger adventure. You can then read up on the City of Brass and prepare for the two complex skill challenges that are the centerpiece of the heroes' mission. Background information about the City of Brass from *Manual of the Planes* may be useful but is not required to run this adventure.

Off the Adventure Path

Even if you are not running "Test of Fire" as part of the Scales of War adventure path, a stealthy infiltration and assault on a besieged City of Brass is about as epic as adventures get. If you don't favor a draconic connection, the dark forces that Bashumgarda has allied with can be any other long-term villain or evil organization in your campaign. In such a scenario, Bashumgarda and Namissi could be reworked as creatures of other types—perhaps a pair of powerful demon lords that have claimed the City of Brass as their domain.

Use one of the following hooks to bring the heroes into such an adventure.

Treasure

As with previous installments of the Scales of War campaign, "Test of Fire" makes use of the parcel system of treasure rewards as described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. The characters should accumulate fifteen treasure parcels by the end of the adventure. You can supply these treasures in whatever way you wish, but the accompanying list presents the most likely encounters to bear treasure.

During your preparation, assign parcels from those that follow to the encounters in the spaces provided. Use the players' wish lists to come up with magic items for the first six parcels. Consider saving at least one or two of the highest-level magic items for the end of the adventure, representing gear the adventurers can claim from their victories over Bashumgarda and Namissi or a reward granted by Estumishu or Bahamut for the heroes' service to the City of Brass and the cause of good.

Treasure Parcels

Parcel A: _____, K1
(carried by the black slaad overlord).
Parcel B: _____, K3
(scattered within the rubble).
Parcel C: _____, B1 (a gift from Estumishu as a sign of trust if the heroes succeed at the skill challenge; if the adventurers fail the challenge, add to parcels L-O).
Parcel D: _____, B1 (as above).
Parcel E: _____, B2 (carried by the leader of a patrol encountered in the course of the skill challenge; if none, add to parcels L-O).
Parcel F: _____, B2 (as above).
Parcel G: _____, B3
(carried by the greenspawn defender).
Parcel H: _____, B4
(carried by the redspawn magmastomper).
Parcel I: _____, B5
(carried by the pyremasters).
Parcel J: _____, B5
(carried by Bashumgarda; see the tactical encounter).
Parcel K: _____, B5 (as above)
Parcel L: _____, after F2
(reward from Estumishu).
Parcel M: _____, after F2 (as above).
Parcel N: _____, after F2
(reward from Bahamut).
Parcel O: _____, after F2 (as above).

Based on the guidelines in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, the following parcels can be placed in the areas above.

Parcel 1: Magic item, level 30
Parcel 2: Magic item, level 30
Parcel 3: Magic item, level 30
Parcel 4: Magic item, level 30
Parcel 5: Magic item, level 30
Parcel 6: Magic item, level 29
Parcel 7: 75 ad + two *potions of recovery*
Parcel 8: 50 ad + 500 pp
Parcel 9: 50 ad + three ceremonial holy symbols of Tiamat (15,000 gp each) + 500 pp
Parcel 10: two *potions of life* + eight elemental onyx rings (50,000 gp each)
Parcel 11: 100 ad
Parcel 12: 70 ad + 200 pp
Parcel 13: 60 ad + one *potion of life* + 200 pp
Parcel 14: six astral diamond signets (50,000 gp each) + two *potions of recovery* + 100 pp
Parcel 15: 25 ad

A Friend in Need

A powerful patron or ally of the characters has strong business or family connections to the City of Brass. He comes to the heroes in a panic, having heard that the great planar metropolis has been besieged. He knows of the secret portal in the Keening Delve and offers the adventurers a powerful incentive to restore the city to normalcy.

The Curse of Namissi

The heroes are on their way to the City of Brass by *planar dromond* or some other form of planar travel when their journey is abruptly halted. The city is sealed behind magical wards unleashed by a cursed artifact, its leaders and people driven to madness. An impromptu skill challenge allows the characters to gain information regarding the portal in the Keening Delve. The heroes' infiltration of the city allows them to parley with its efreet leaders who've been driven underground to save their lives. The adventurers must then fight their way across the city in order to face the efreet sorcerer whose mind the artifact has claimed and the monstrous guardian that protects it.

Part One: The Summons of Bahamut

In the immediate aftermath of the events of "Those Once Loyal," Bahamut's thoughts flash through the characters' minds, bidding them return to Sayre; then the Platinum Dragon vanishes without another word. As the adventure begins, the heroes have returned to Sayre to rest. Bahamut's return and the sacrifice of Amyria are events of world-shaking importance. Word of the Platinum Dragon's rebirth spreads quickly through the lands and people of the Coalition. At the same time, word is received that Bahamut's forces have rallied around the deity's return and that the armies of Tiamat have lost the advantage they gained from the Platinum Dragon's death.

The adventurers have ample time to attend to personal business in Sayre and to be briefed on any information they might have failed to glean in previous adventures. This adventure begins with the arrival of an emissary from Bahamut.

An Unexpected Envoy

The characters awake to the clamor of warning bells sounding out across Sayre.

Throngs of city folk are running in panic through the streets even as militia guards and coalition warriors race in the opposite direction toward the March. A din of voices shouts about some disaster striking at that shabby monument site, but details are lost in the panic. As you race along the rapidly emptying streets, the source of the chaos becomes obvious. In the middle of the March, a gargantuan silver dragon paces within a field of shattered arches and statuary. Its claws rend the ground as it idly scratches, and even as you push through the field of uncertain guards surrounding it at a safe distance, the dragon's head swings slowly toward you. "You've come," it growls. "Prepare for thy journey. My lord Bahamut desires to speak with thee."

The great silver dragon Xerefri is an exarch of Bahamut. It is the master of powerful planar magic and is charged with bringing the heroes to the Platinum Dragon at his temporary command center in the Astral Sea. If characters ask, witnesses describe how the creature appeared suddenly within the open ground of the March in a blast of white light and storm-force winds, with panic quickly following.

Xerefri poses no threat but the dragon is entirely indifferent to the destruction his arrival has caused. He will not apologize if asked to by the characters; the exarch has no patience for such trivial concerns. Only his mission is important.

When you are ready to depart, Xerefri orders you to stand close by. The dragon creates a Planar Portal that rises from the ground to swirl around you. A blast of arcane power shatters the last of Lord Limbic's statuary as you and the exarch disappear.

The Crystal Tear

The reborn Bahamut has temporarily abandoned his castle domain in Celestia as he focuses on leading his forces against Tiamat. The Platinum Dragon's new command center is a specially created astral realm known as the Crystal Tear.

The familiar vista of Sayre melts and vanishes to be replaced with a field of shimmering, silver light. You find yourselves soaring like disembodied spirits in a bright nonspace surrounding a crystal teardrop that grows in size as you plunge toward it. With a shudder, you pass within. Suddenly you are standing on a white dais in a great translucent chamber. Crystal walls reflect the dozen great dragons surrounding you. Xerefri murmurs a greeting as he takes his place among them. "My lord, the heroes are here."

Bahamut awaited the arrival of the adventurers with his exarch war council comprised of a dozen metallic dragons of great size and age.

Silver and gold, copper and iron, and all the other hues of the metallic dragon races are here, but there is no mistaking the monumental figure that all give fealty to. Bahamut towers before you once more, proud and mighty. But then the great Platinum Dragon dips his head, slightly but significantly. One by one, the other dragons follow, lowering their heads nearly to the level of yours in a majestic salute.

"Friends," Bahamut rumbles. "Champions. Welcome."

Fortunes of War

The heroes are made welcome to the Crystal Tear, a bounded astral dominion of sweeping crystal chambers set with pillars of platinum and other precious metals. This is the war room and council chamber from which Bahamut and his exarchs direct the battle against the armies of Tiamat.

After a drawn-out process of introduction between the characters and the council, Bahamut directs the characters to private chambers, saying he will meet them shortly for further conversation. The adventurers' quarters are in an opulent wing of marble halls whose shape and contents are divinely mutable according to the characters' own will.

Bahamut comes to the characters a few hours later, but the characters might be shocked to see the form he has taken—a venerable human male with a fringe of white hair and a snow-white beard. Though his platinum robes are a far cry from the peasant's garb he once wore, the same seven yellow canaries perch on Bahamut's shoulders as when the heroes met him in the lost mines of Karak (*Dungeon*® #159).

The adventurers no doubt have countless questions, and Bahamut is happy to provide answers as he explains the purpose of his summons.

Was the bird man in the Karak Lode really you?

"Yes and no. That was not I in the way you see me now—the whole of my physical presence and consciousness. Rather, think of that figure as an avatar of sorts, unaware of me as I was unaware of it, but roaming the mortal realm as a fragment of my mind and will. Even then, it seems that the fates already knew our paths were intertwined."

What happened to Amyria? Is she truly gone?

"Amyria was possessed of a splinter of my consciousness and life force, not unlike that which manifested to aid you in the Karak Lode. The creation of that fragment was a gamble against fate which would have failed countless times if not for Amyria's bravery, and yours. Though I have not yet regained my full strength, by her sacrifice I live again. As to her ultimate fate, that is no more known to me than is the fate of any of us."

What is this place?

"The Crystal Tear is an astral dominion forged by my will and the power of my exarchs. It is home and council chamber, a site whose edges touch all other planes and from which we can observe the war against Tiamat as it rages across those planes."

How goes the war? Haven't Tiamat's plans been broken by your return?

"The war has turned under the pressure of a tide that the Dragon Queen could never have predicted, but it is not won. The forces of good and law hold their own, but Tiamat's power is carved out by treachery. With each failure, the Dragon Queen need simply seek the next betrayal that will fuel her ambition.

"The word of my return shattered the resolve of Tiamat's forces and gave our own armies a much-needed chance to regroup. In the weeks since my return, we have taken the fight to them, and we are near the endgame now."

What is that endgame? What are Tiamat's plans?

"The Dragon Queen has sent nearly half her remaining force to her last redoubt in the planes—the City of Brass in the Elemental Chaos. Already, our forces lay siege against her blue exarch who stands in command there, but his power is formidable. He is an ancient wyrm named Namissi whose thirst for blood is unequalled. We must break his defense, and time is short."

What is Tiamat doing in the City of Brass?

"The Dragon Queen has entered into dark bargains with the Lord of the Efreets, the powerful and power-hungry Bashumgarda. He believes that this alliance will grant him control of the Elemental Chaos, but Tiamat's treachery runs deep. Her ritualists have used the great knowledge of the efreets to channel the raw energy of the elements. She intends to claim the efreets' power as her own and to infuse her armies with elemental might that could tip the tide of battle."

How long will the siege continue?

"We might break the magical wards that protect the city and Tiamat's army within a week ... if we had that much time. We do not. Just as the arcane wards of efreet and dragon hold us at bay, our ritualists have sealed the basalt plain of the city and the Sea of Fire against Tiamat's remaining armies which are amassing to break our siege. Using the power of the Well of Worlds, dragon ritualists have effectively blocked the Elemental Chaos to planar travel by Tiamat's forces, but we cannot maintain those wards for long. Within a day, Tiamat's forces will batter through our barrier and we will be caught between two armies. We must take the city, and quickly."

What do you need us to do?

"The City of Brass is sealed against physical incursion, the power of teleportation, and all forms of planar travel. Bashumgarda holds the city in an iron grip, and his allegiance to Tiamat will not waver. Our spies have determined, however, that there are cracks in both of these defenses.

Although Bashumgarda promised his people power, Tiamat's forces have taken over in all but name. Many of the efreet nobles now chafe under Bashumgarda's reign. One of those, the lord Estumishu, has sway over the nobility

and a claim to the throne of the Charcoal Palace as strong as Bashumgarda's. By magical communication, we have treated with him, but he will not commit to joining us. A direct appeal—a meeting within the city itself—must change his mind."

How will an envoy get into the City of Brass?

"One of Estumishu's followers has aided us there, with rumors of an ancient portal set within a shrine inside the city. Its power is primordial in origin, so it is not hindered by Tiamat's magic. This Portal of Forgotten Fire connects to another primordial shrine lost in the legendary Keening Delve. That warren of timeless tunnels and cursed ruins sits not far from the City of Brass, but its narrow passages cannot be trod by dragons. A group of mortals must find their way through the delve and enter the city.

"Estumishu negotiates from a position of both power and pride. Those who treat with him must be able to do so as his equals and to speak with Bahamut's voice. This mission cannot fail, my friends. I trust it to no one but you."

Preparations

Once the characters agree to undertake Bahamut's mission to the City of Brass, they are given a few hours to prepare. The party's goals as set out by Bahamut are:

- ✦ Enter the Keening Delve and locate the shrine containing the Portal of Forgotten Fire.
- ✦ Gate across to the City of Brass and meet with Estumishu's contact.
- ✦ Attend a summit with the efreet noble and convince him and his followers to aid Bahamut's cause.

Bahamut does not know the specifics of what the heroes will face in the Keening Delve, but he can provide the information outlined under "The Keening Delve," below. He also briefs the characters regarding their contact in the City of Brass.

"Estumishu's agent is an efreet named Selerin. It is she who has been our go-between and who will take you to a secret council where you will speak. We know little of Estumishu except his hatred for Bashumgarda. He is a noteworthy noble of the efreets, but wickedness runs deep in even the best of their kind. It is said that his followers call him 'The Smiling King,' but I fear your reception may not be a friendly one."

Bahamut will send the adventurers to within striking distance of their destination—a particular warren of the Keening Delve where the shrine concealing the Gate of Forgotten Fire is said to be found. Bahamut does not yet know, however, that persuading Estumishu and his followers to rise up against Tiamat will require that the heroes kill Bashumgarda. The characters will discover this only in the course of their negotiations.

Likewise, Bahamut is only partly correct in his assessment of Tiamat's reasons for holding the City of Brass. The Dragon Queen's plots to augment her forces with elemental power are already well underway (the characters will discover this in the course of the adventure—see page 27 for details).

A strict 24-hour time frame for the mission is not an absolute requirement. The adventurers should, however, have a clear sense that time is of the essence. The events in the City of Brass happen at a fast pace, and the characters can take only two extended rests during this adventure—one in the aftermath of the Keening Delve, the other while in the city (see the "Through the City of Brass" skill challenge, page 38, for more information).

When the heroes are ready, Bahamut leads them to the council chamber where Xerefri waits to take them to the Elemental Chaos.

Test of Fire

As befits the home of the Efreets, the City of Brass is a settlement whose strength is built on the power of elemental fire. Hundreds of thousands of non-efreets also dwell here. Members of the mortal races find the environment within the city searingly hot but ultimately manageable. The adventurers' mission to the City of Brass will see them exposed to the realm's most potent hazards.

If none of the characters have any way to reduce at least some damage from exposure to fire (through powers or magic items), consider having Bahamut offer each hero a *potion of resistance* as part of the treasure given out for this adventure. Likewise, *potions of resistance* can find their way into the treasure found during the adventure (including gifts bestowed by Estumishu).

On the other hand, if the characters have somehow all picked up full-time fire immunity by this point in their adventuring careers, their excursion into the City of Brass might prove less challenging than you'd like. In such a case, feel free to chip away at the heroes' immunity from time to time. The elite defenders of the City of Brass might be specially trained to overcome immunity to fire, expecting that creatures intent on attacking the city would depend on such a defense. This training could take the form of the following power which can be added to any creature:

Defender of the Flame (minor; recharge)
This creature makes a basic attack that deals fire damage against a creature with immunity to fire. On a hit, the target takes no damage but loses its immunity to fire until the end of this creature's next turn.

Part Two: Forgotten Fire

In order to breach the nigh-impenetrable defenses of the City of Brass, the adventurers must seek out an ancient primordial shrine in the heart of the Keening Delve—a legendary labyrinth twisting deep into the elemental rock on which the City of Brass is built.

Arriving in the Elemental Chaos

A planar portal summoned by Xerefri brings the heroes to a rocky plateau above the City of Brass. Characters who have played "Beyond the Mottled Tower" (*Dungeon* #163) have seen the great Sea of Fire before, but the view from the vast basalt plate on which the City of Brass stands is more impressive by far.

With a shudder, the council chamber and Bahamut melt away to a field of shimmering silver, then a haze of red firelight and seething smoke. The heat hits like a hammer as you find yourselves standing atop a high bluff of black stone. To one side, a field of basalt stretches as far as the eye can see. To the other, perhaps three miles away if distance is reckoned here as it is in the world, the roiling Sea of Fire blazes with an unholy light.

At the sea's edge, the walls of the great City of Brass burn with the brightness of molten gold. The light of the city is dimmed by a seething dome of magical force that surrounds it on all sides. Pressed up against this barrier, an army stands ready. Smaller figures and their camps spread around the walls of the city, but it is the dragons that dominate the field—a force perhaps five thousand strong.

Even at this distance, their battle cries ring loud over the roar of the sea and over a distant shrieking that seems to rise from the empty basalt plain behind you. Xerefri growls as he cranes his long neck toward that shrieking, away from the city. "There," he says, indicating a great red-black rift that splits the ground a mile away. "May fate and goodness guide thee." Then with a crack of thunder and a blast of wind, the silver exarch is gone.

The Keening Delve

The vast basalt plate on which the City of Brass stands is threaded by an ageless and endless series of tunnels cut through a great mass of blood-red rock, as introduced in *Manual of the Planes*. The Keening Delve is a labyrinthine warren of ruined tunnels and caverns threaded by an endless shrieking wind—according to legend, the echoing scream of a primordial slain in the Dawn War. In the heart of the Elemental Chaos, Haemnathuun fought against Bahamut, Bane, and Ioun, and was slain. Countless centuries later, the wind that is his dying breath has scoured his former citadel into ruin.

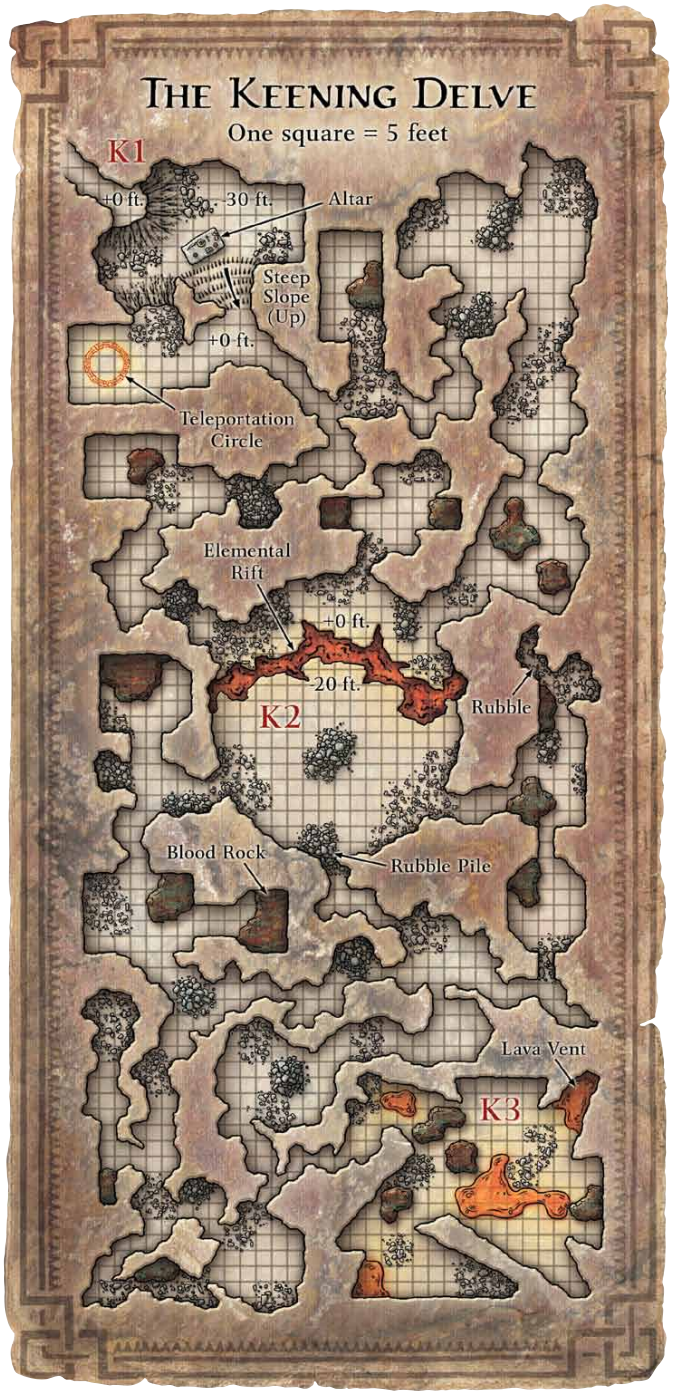
The Keening Delve is a place of madness and mystery now inhabited by slaads, demons, elementals, and other foul creatures. Great treasures are said to be lost there, including artifacts and magic from the Dawn War. Some say that Haemnathuun's living heart still beats at the center of this labyrinth, patiently awaiting the chance to be reborn.

A Lasting Coalition

This penultimate episode of the Scales of War adventure path provides a good opportunity to pull together the threads and events of previous adventures, showing how Bahamut's forces are drawn from a wide range of races and planes. If the adventurers liberated Nefelus in "Alliance at Nefelus" (*Dungeon* #165), that city-state's deva mages should be front and center in Bahamut's forces. If the heroes negotiated an alliance with Gith in "A Tyranny of Souls" (*Dungeon* #168), flying githyanki warships share the skies over the City of Brass with Bahamut's dragons. Here and in the final battle (Encounters F1 and F2), the characters should see that their earlier efforts have paid off as the adventure path pushes toward Tiamat's endgame.

Days of Future Passed

The portion of the Keening Delve presented in this adventure is one small fragment of this site's endless maze of tunnels and caverns. The full extent of the ruins is outside the scope of the adventure—and, most likely, outside the interest of the heroes at this late stage of their adventuring careers. If you like continuity in your campaigns, a new generation of heroes might return to this spot in the long aftermath of the Scales of War, and hear legends or see signs of the adventurers' presence here as they undertake their own expedition into the Keening Delve.



Features of the Keening Delve

The caverns and chambers of the Keening Delve share the following common features.

Illumination: Except as indicated in the encounter descriptions, there is no light in any of the caverns of the Keening Delve.

Walls, Floors, and Ceilings: Passageways in the delve run from 6 to 10 feet high; caverns and chambers are typically 20 to 30 feet high. Walls, floors, and ceilings are all rough stone, even in areas that were clearly once finished chambers. There are numerous areas on the map where passageways are so narrow that Medium creatures must squeeze to gain access.

Blood Rock: Areas of mottled red-black stone across the cavern floor are blood rock, infused with the energy of ancient battles fought here. These patches of stone do not stand out unless the characters make specific attempts to discern them (a DC 28 Perception or Arcana check). A creature standing in an area of blood rock scores a critical hit on a natural die roll of 19 or 20.

Keening Wail: The Keening Delve rings out constantly with the shriek of a wailing wind. The ever-present din of this keening wail bestows a –10 penalty to Perception checks made in the Keening Delve and makes it impossible for creatures to communicate using speech at a distance of more than 10 squares.

Approach and Entrance

The heroes can easily make their way across the basalt flats to the fissure that marks this entrance to the Keening Delve.

The shrieking wind grows louder as you approach, to the point where speech becomes impossible at anything less than a shout. The red-black scar plunges deep into the basalt plain, forming a rough passageway leading down into darkness.

Unless you wish to develop further sections of the Keening Delve as a preamble to the characters' adventures in the City of Brass, the passageway runs approximately one-quarter mile before emerging in area K1 (see below).

Additional Encounters in the Keening Delve

Although much of this section of the Keening Delve is uninhabited, it should inspire caution and careful exploration on the part of the adventurers. The heroes should not automatically know that these areas are empty, so as to keep them on their toes when the encounters come. You can fill some of these empty spaces with additional encounters if you desire.

In particular, if the heroes are not already at least halfway through 27th level, add enough level-appropriate encounters to the Keening Delve to bring them close to 28th level by the time they reach the City of Brass.

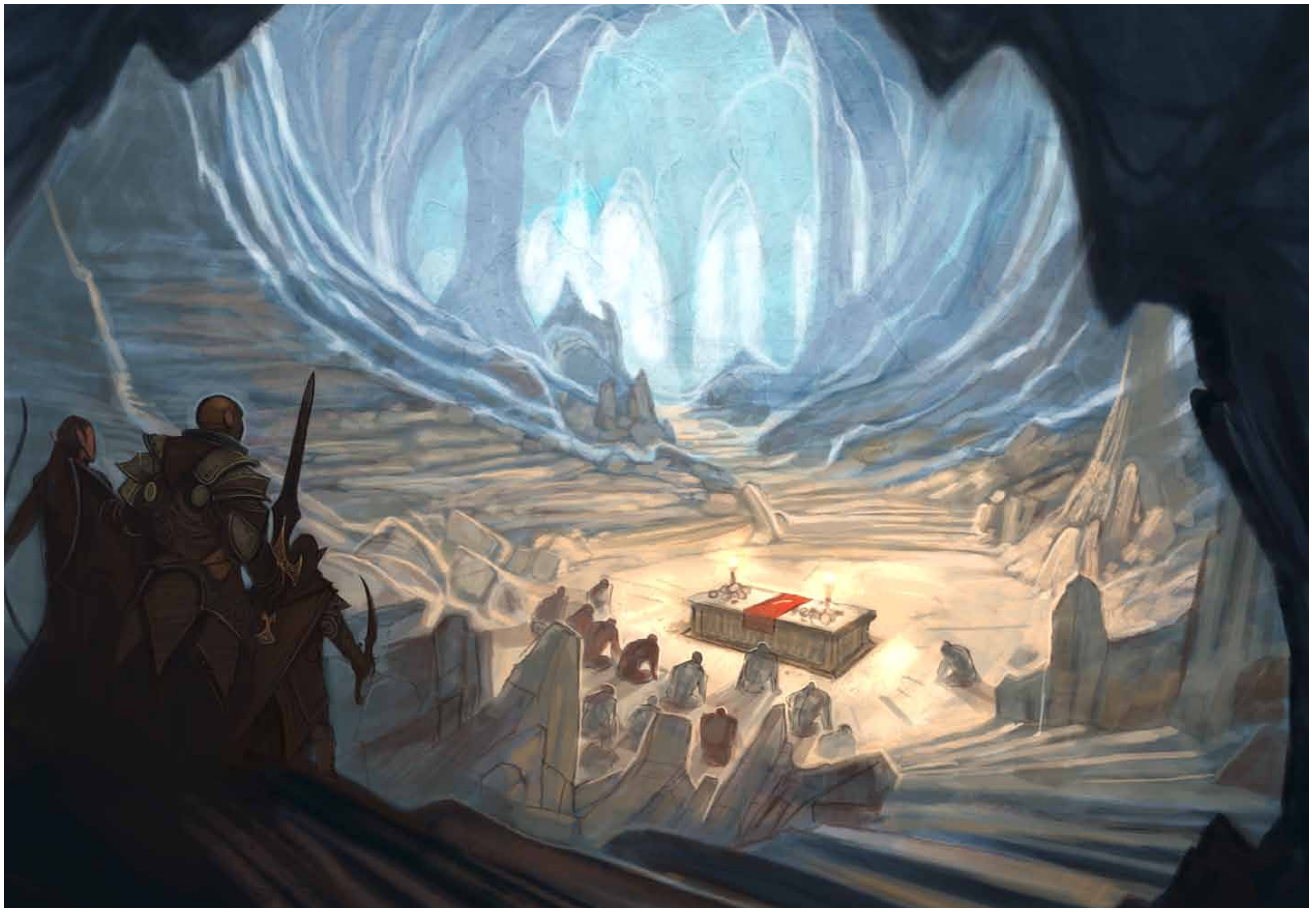
Set up additional encounters in the Keening Delve by choosing encounter groups from those listed below, or use these groups as inspiration for creating your own encounters.

Denizens of the Delve

Creatures of all sorts, from demons to elementals to mortal explorers, are drawn to the mysteries of the Keening Delve.

Level 25 Encounter (XP 35,400)

- ✦ 1 eladrin lich (level 24 elite controller, *MM* 176)
- ✦ 2 mariliths (level 24 elite skirmisher, *MM* 57)
- ✦ 2 soulspike devourers (level 20 elite soldier, *MM* 69)



Level 26 Encounter (XP 54,000)

- ✦ 1 balor (level 27 elite brute, *MM* 53)
- ✦ 1 beholder eye of chaos (level 25 elite artillery, *MM2* 25)
- ✦ 1 thunderblast cyclone (level 26 elite artillery, *MM* 105 or encounter K2)

Level 27 Encounter (XP 60,300)

- ✦ 2 abyssal rotfiends (level 26 controller, *MM* 52 or Encounter K3)
- ✦ 1 efreet karadjin (level 28 soldier, *MM* 100)
- ✦ 1 efreet pyresinger (level 25 controller, *MM* 99)
- ✦ 1 glabrezu (level 23 elite brute, *MM* 54)
- ✦ 2 great flameskulls (level 24 artillery, *MM* 109)

Traps and Hazards

In addition to creature-based encounters, an expanded Keening Delve can feature a range of traps and hazards.

Entropic Collapse: Upgrade this hazard from level 23 to level 27 with a +4 bonus to attack rolls and a +2 bonus to damage rolls (*DMG* 92).

Haemnathuun's Heart: A fragment of the fallen primordial's crystalline heart creates a deadly trap at the center of an ancient shrine. Modify a soul gem (*DMG* 93) to deal psychic damage instead of radiant damage.

Symbol of Suffering: Upgrade this hazard from level 24 to level 26 with a +2 bonus to attack rolls and a +1 bonus to damage rolls (*DMG* 93).

Voice of Chaos: The walls of a ruined cavern echo and amplify the keening wail of the delve to a deadly hazard. Modify a far realm star trap (*DMG2* 74) to incorporate shimmering fields of sonic energy instead of motes (Perception DC 26 to notice). The hazard deals psychic damage instead of radiant damage.

Keening Delve Encounters

As they seek the Portal of Forgotten Fire, the characters must contend with some of the mad denizens of the Keening Delve.

K1: Slaad Outpost

A slaad war party makes use of an ancient portal to come and go from this ruined shrine.

As the adventurers move in from the entrance to the Keening Delve, read:

The narrow passage twists sharply as it descends, requiring a combination of squeezing and careful climbing to navigate. The keening wail of wind never lets up, even as the passage begins to straighten and level after perhaps a quarter-mile of slow movement.

From ahead, the pitch-black darkness shows a sudden flare of light. The passage appears to end at a narrow stone shelf some hundred strides ahead, a dimly lit cavern beyond.

Tactical Encounter: K1. Slaad Outpost (page 29).

K2: Elemental Rift

Raw elemental energy pours forth from a great rift in the heart of this section of the Keening Delve.

When the characters are within 50 feet of either entrance, read:

From ahead, a distant din rises—a sound like an approaching storm, thunder echoing over the shrieking wind.

The rift is a hazard that the heroes must cross, but deadlier still are the elemental creatures drawn to its power.

Tactical Encounter: K2. Planar Rift (page 31).

K3: Primordial Shrine

This ancient shrine is home to a group of demons that make use of its latent planar power. Even over the noise of the wind, the adventurers can gain an advance warning of what awaits them.

When the characters are within 30 feet of the entrance to the shrine, read:

Faintly over the shriek of the keening wail that threads the caverns, a voice can be heard, shouting.

Perception Check, for a hero who understands Abyssal
DC 33: *The shrill tones of a demon howl in Abyssal, berating a servant from the sounds of it.*

The lava vent in the upper right arm of the chamber is the Portal of Forgotten Fire, which connects to an abandoned primordial temple in the City of Brass.

Tactical Encounter: K3. Primordial Shrine (page 33).

To the City of Brass

Once the portal has been activated, the characters can step through it to be taken to the City of Brass (see below). The portal sits on the surface of the lava pool and does not confer any protection against fire to those who plunge into it. A creature using the portal takes 2d6 + 8 fire damage.

Part Three: The City of Brass

The adventurers' mission for Bahamut takes them into the City of Brass—the great home of efreets and the heart of trade and commerce in the Elemental Chaos. The City of Brass is introduced in *Manual of the Planes*, and the information presented here is taken from that supplement. Efreet culture and society is explored in more detail in *The Plane Below*.

CITY OF BRASS TRAITS

Type: Elemental realm.
Size and Shape: Walled metropolis surrounded by a sea of fire; bounded.
Gravity: Elemental buoyancy.
Mutability: Normal.
Fire Affinity: Attacks with the fire keyword gain a +1 bonus to the attack roll, and attacks with the cold keyword deal half damage (ongoing cold damage is not affected).

Arriving in the City of Brass

The Portal of Forgotten Fire takes the heroes to a secret primordial shrine in the Ashlarks ward. (See the "Through the City of Brass" skill challenge on page 38 for general information on this ward and all areas of the city.)

A sudden lurch spills you to the stone floor of a chamber brightly lit by stone braziers. Ancient Primordial runes which match those seen in the Keening Delve line the walls, marking this place as another shrine. As you look around, you are distracted by movement. A young efreet female leaps to her feet where she appears to have been dozing in the corner. She nods deferentially. "I am Selerin, servant of my lord Estumishu. Please, follow me."

Though not overly friendly, Selerin is deferential to the characters. She answers any questions put to her but knows little of the party's mission other than that they are to meet with Estumishu and that the efreet noble is waiting.

The City of Brass

The City of Brass is the grand home of the efreets, the greatest settlement in the Elemental Chaos, and the most significant center of trade and commerce in all the planes. The city is detailed in *Manual of the Planes*, but much of the information in that book has been summarized and reworked for this adventure in Encounter B2 (starting on page 38).

The City of Brass

The capital city of the efreets, the City of Brass is the marketplace of the universe, where virtually anything can be bought or sold.

Population: Approximately 500,000. Efreets form the upper class of the city, with only a handful of disgraced members standing outside the noble caste. Other residents include salamanders, archons, azers, genasi, fire giants and titans, demons, and other intelligent elemental creatures, as well as a smaller number of visitors and immigrants from the natural world. Roughly two-thirds of the city's residents are slaves.

Government: Bashumgarda is the Lord of the Efreets, ruling the city from his Charcoal Palace.

Defense: An entire caste of slaves are born and raised as soldiers to defend the City of Brass against incursion from the wider Elemental Chaos and the Abyss. These include archons, azers, and salamanders. A corps of fanatical efreet warriors called the Unquenchable patrol the Charcoal Palace. The city guard, housed in the Ashlarks district, consists primarily of archon and salamander soldiers.

Inns and Taverns: The best place for visitors to find food or lodging is the district of Iskalat, near the city's harbor. The inns and taverns ringing the harbor cater to travelers from across the Elemental Chaos and other planes beyond. Guests are advised to keep a close eye on their valuables and be wary of con artists, but little risk of death or enslavement exists.

Supplies: Commoner's Market; Street of Steel in the Keffinspires; Marlgate warehouses; Pyraculum bazaar. Anything can be bought in the City of Brass. The Commoner's Market in the district of Avencina is an ideal place to secure both ordinary and exotic goods of a nonmagical nature. The Keffinspires district is home to most of the city's smiths, who make and sell magical and mundane items including weapons and armor. The warehouses of the Marlgate district hold goods brought from across the planes for trade in the city, and the bazaars of Pyraculum offer the greatest diversity of high-quality goods.

Temples: The City of Brass is hostile to worshipers of the deities. It houses no public temples to any gods. The primordial known as the Fire Lord, Imix, has an opulent temple in the Furnace called the Eternal Flame Pavilion. Residents of the city are strongly encouraged to offer praise and gratitude to the lord of the Charcoal Palace in large shrines located in each district.

Features of the City of Brass

The streets and public spaces of the City of Brass share the following common features.

Illumination: The City of Brass is brightly lit at all times. The Sea of Fire, its canals, and hanging lamp-pots of unquenchable elemental fire all add to the fiery illumination cast off by the city's efreet residents and the countless other fire creatures that dwell here.

The Secret Shrine

The secret shrine is set within the enclave of a lesser noble (an ally beholden to Estumishu). A false door leads out to an elevated courtyard. This residential area is empty at present on Estumishu's orders. From the courtyard, the adventurers can catch sight of the street below and get their first glimpse of the City of Brass preparing for war.

The City of Brass is well known as a center of commerce and interplanar trade, but the city you see as you follow Selerin across the courtyard bears no resemblance to the tales you've heard. The streets throng not with merchants and planar travelers but with armed troops. Elite efreet guard squads march along the main roads or soar above them. Packs of azers and archons, genasi and salamanders stand guard at every intersection, their slave status marked by the bracelets at their wrists.

Everywhere, the servants of Tiamat show their control over the city. Dragonspawn lead squads of slave warriors or bark orders to scowling efreets. Dragons of every size perch atop buildings or soar overhead. The largest of these is a gargantuan blue beast whose terrible cry echoes across the city as he wings his way along the underside of the shimmering force dome. On the other side of that barrier, Bahamut's forces circle in response, watching and waiting for their chance to attack.

City of Brass Encounters

The characters have come to the City of Brass expecting only to have to broker an alliance with the noble Estumishu. Winning the support of the efreets for an insurrection against Bashumgarda and Tiamat will prove to be a complicated task.

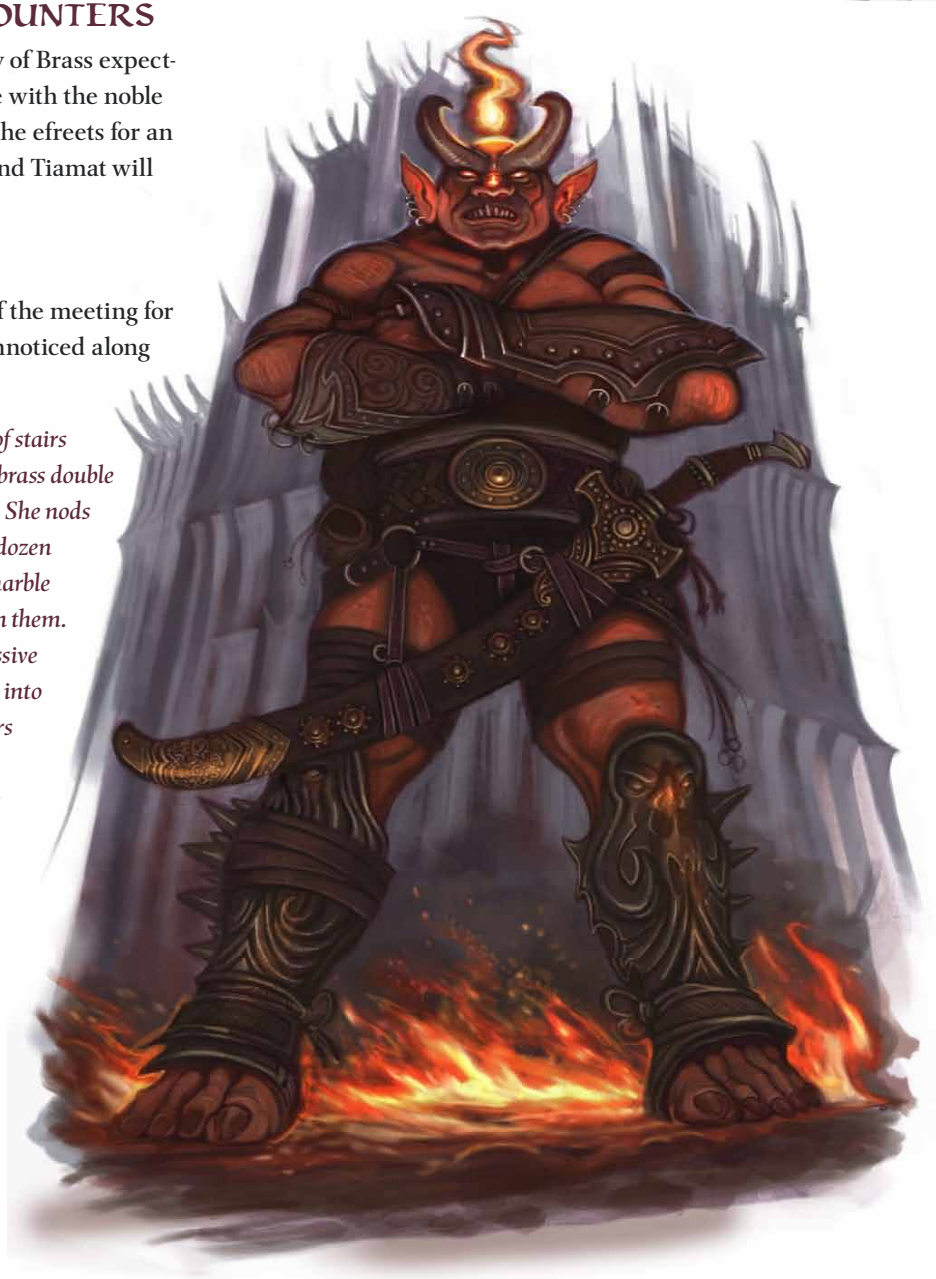
B1: Efreet Alliance

Estumishu has chosen the location of the meeting for maximum security. The heroes go unnoticed along the short journey from the shrine.

At the end of the courtyard, a wide flight of stairs leads down into darkness. At the bottom, brass double doors open at a coded knock from Selerin. She nods as she falls back to let you enter. Inside, a dozen efreet guards lining both sides of a wide marble corridor watch darkly as you pass between them.

Beyond the end of the corridor, a massive vaulted chamber opens up, its roof rising into shadow a hundred feet overhead. Braziers and torches along all the walls shed light against a shroud of smoke and heat haze and show that the floor rises in six great tiers around a central open court twenty paces on a side.

This place is one of the many Crucible Courts of the City of Brass—great meeting halls where efreet nobles work out disputes with a combination of subtle diplomacy and brutal martial skill.



The tiers of the room might hold three-hundred efreets packed shoulder to shoulder, but only a dozen are here now, alone at the far end of the chamber. At their center stands a hulking figure in fine jewelry and with a gem-studded scimitar at his belt to demonstrate his rank. As you approach, the figure seems to offer you an awkward smile, but that grin is overshadowed by the burning anger of his eyes.

"Welcome," the efreet noble says, but there is no hint of welcome in his voice. His great protruding teeth flash the false smile again as he appraises you, one by one. "You stand before Estumishu. Speak the will of your masters, and quickly."

Persuading Estumishu to support Bahamut's cause and lead the angry efreet nobility in an uprising against Tiamat will be an arduous process for the adventurers. A complex skill challenge provides the framework for these unique negotiations.

Skill Challenge: B1. Efreet Alliance (page 36).

Bashumgarda Must Die

The characters' success or failure sets the groundwork for their subsequent adventures in the City of Brass. Finding and killing Bashumgarda is the only way to win Estumishu's allegiance. This new mission can be pressed upon the party in one of two ways.

Success

If the heroes succeed at the skill challenge, they win Estumishu's favor. The Smiling King's smirk is real as he lays out his terms.

"You have carried yourselves favorably. Honor to your masters and to you. Estumishu, true Lord of the Efreets and challenger to the traitor Bashumgarda, will ally as agreed with Bahamut and the forces of the Platinum Dragon on the following three conditions: all dragons and dragonkin are to quit the City of Brass, which shall be returned to the rule of the efreets; the wealth of the Dragon Queen's armies shall remain in the city to offset debts incurred by Bashumgarda's treachery; and the gates of the city shall be opened to Bahamut's forces only once Bashumgarda is slain."

Whether or not the players saw this development coming, the characters are likely to want to argue their sudden involvement in an assassination. Estumishu will not back down from this demand, because an assassination attempt by outsiders leads to a guaranteed win for him regardless of whether it succeeds or fails. If the adventurers kill Bashumgarda, Estumishu takes the throne with nothing connecting him to the killing, making it easier for him to bring Bashumgarda loyalists under his control. If the heroes fail to kill Bashumgarda, the attempt will drive Bashumgarda into a rage and draconian countermeasures that alienate even more of his followers and shift the balance of power further in Estumishu's favor.

Estumishu has no interest in further discussion. He and his entourage leave the Crucible Court immediately once his demands have been declared.

Failure

If the characters fail the skill challenge, Estumishu makes no effort to hide his disdain.

"You are mortal children playing at the tasks of heroes. Go back to your Bahamut with this message: Your war means nothing and your forces will fall, as will Tiamat's armies, in one year, or ten, or one hundred. For as long as we must, the efreets shall endure, and we will not forget the treachery of dragonkind."

The efreet lord and his entourage leave the Crucible Court, taking to the air once outside. As soon as the adventurers leave, however, a voice calls to them.

"My lord Estumishu is great, but his wrath is easily kindled. Forgive him, please." From the smoke and shadow of the stairs, Selerin steps forth and bows to you. "I am not worthy of rank to enter the Crucible Court, but I have heard its outcome. My loyalty is to my lord Estumishu but also to my city and its people. I sense you are loyal to your masters. If they would see the City of Brass join with them against the Dragon Queen, there is still a way."

The Price of Failure

The adventurers' mission to kill Bashumgarda is challenging enough in and of itself. However, failure in this skill challenge makes the task even more daunting.

Success in this challenge means that Estumishu provides the characters with enough information to guide them relatively safely on their journey across the city. In addition to the heroes receiving a general overview of the City of Brass and its wards (see "Movement Through the City" on page 43), the efreet noble's assistance establishes the baseline DCs and the strength of encounters in the "Through the City of Brass" skill challenge (see below).

A failure in this challenge means that the characters must set out with only the minimal knowledge of the city given to them by Selerin. This covers the overview of the city and its wards. The adventurers' lack of specific knowledge forces them to start the "Through the City of Brass" skill challenge with two failures and all the penalties those failures impose. See that challenge (and specifically the "Success and Failure" section) on page 46 for more information.

Estumishu will not allow any of his servants to accompany the heroes on their quest, because he cannot afford to be connected to their actions. Likewise, the young Selerin is a mid-paragon level combatant at best and cannot travel with the characters.

Instead of Estumishu, it is Selerin who tasks the characters with killing Bashumgarda—but as a plea, not an order.

"Lord Bashumgarda has lost the favor of more noble houses than he knows. My lord Estumishu is strongest of those, but there are others. If Bashumgarda falls, they will rally against the blue exarch, whether or not Estumishu leads them. The scepter of the city controls the gates and the magical wards that hold Bahamut's forces at bay, and Bashumgarda controls the scepter. With Bashumgarda dead, those wards can be broken."

Before undertaking their mission into the city, the heroes can return to the secret shrine to take an extended rest. They have only one other opportunity to take an extended rest while in the city.

B2: Through the City of Brass

The adventurers learn Bashumgarda's location from Estumishu or Selerin (depending on the outcome of the previous skill challenge).

"The false Lord of the Efreets is rarely seen outside the barracks of the Ring of Fire. He claims to hold court there with his military advisors, but it is fear that keeps him within. Gain the barracks and you find him."

The heroes must make their way to the Furnace—the political heart of the City of Brass and site of the Charcoal Palace. Meeting the Lord of the Efreets in combat comes only at the end of an arduous journey.

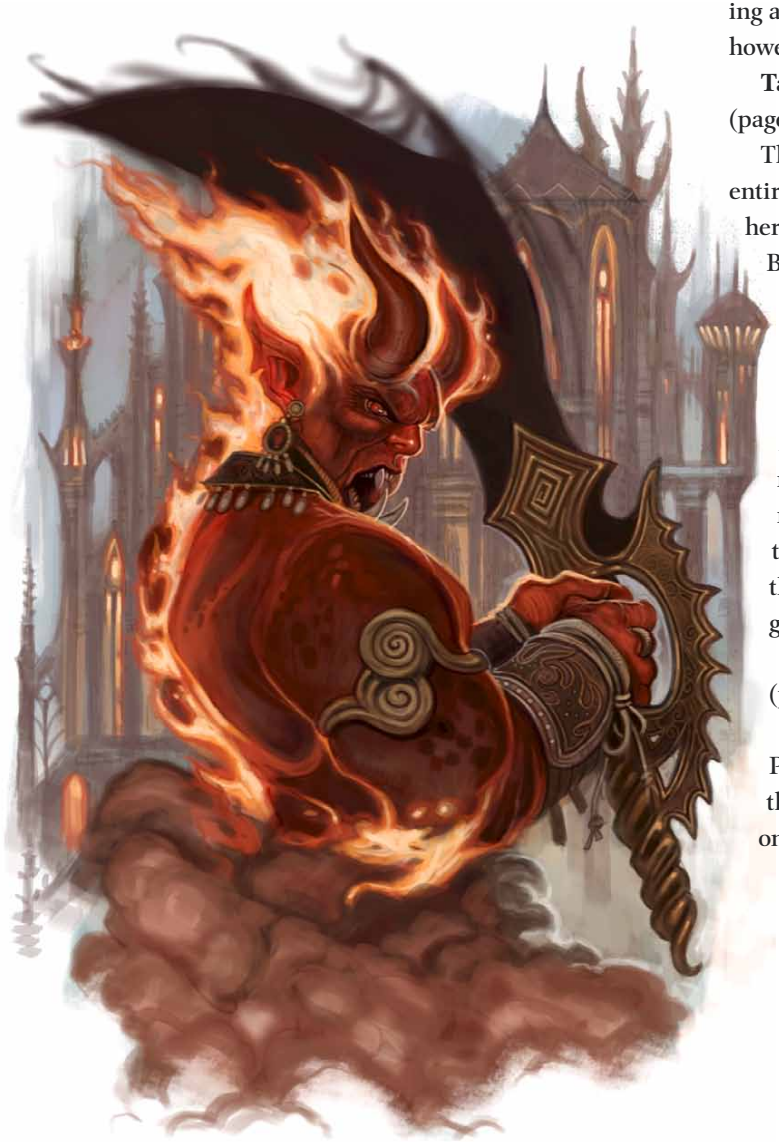
The characters begin the challenge alone in the courtyard adjoining the now-deserted Crucible Court. From there, they gain a more detailed view of the city and can strategize.

Preparations for battle seem to hold the city in an iron grip. In addition to the movements of guards and troops noted earlier, wagons heaped high with arms and armor are in constant motion along the streets, which are packed with throngs of efreets and lesser city folk. Moving within the city and under the watchful eye of Tiamat's forces will be a challenge of the highest order.

The heroes' journey from Ashlarks to the Furnace takes the form of a complex skill challenge that triggers the following three tactical encounters as well as additional encounters with wandering patrols. This travel must be undertaken on foot; teleportation has been shut down by the powerful magical wards protecting the city, and flying would drastically increase the number of encounters the adventurers will face. (Point this out if the players seem inclined to flying.) See the skill challenge for more information.

Skill Challenge: B2. Through the City of Brass (page 38).

The characters have a chance to take one extended rest at some point in their journey across the City of Brass. Their choice of when to do so should depend on how well they avoid patrols and how they fare in the encounters.



B3: Canal Crossing

Fiery canals flow in from the Sea of Fire to crisscross the city. Crossing most canals is simply a matter of avoiding guards while moving over bridges, hopping across the decks of moored barges, or simply jumping at a narrow crossing. One well-watched crossing, however, requires a full assault against the guards.

Tactical Encounter: B3. Canal Crossing (page 45).

The choice of where to place encounter B3 is entirely up to you. It works best as the final canal the heroes must cross on their way toward the Furnace. Be aware that characters moving from Marlgate or Keffinspires to Avencina, or from Marlgate to the Char, have only one canal to cross.

B4: Gate Crashers

As the adventurers approach the Furnace, they must deal with the increased defenses of that most important ward. The walls in the interior of the city have been sealed, making it necessary for the heroes to fight their way through one of two great gates.

Tactical Encounter: B4. Gate Crashers (page 47).

This encounter takes place either at the Phoenix Gate (accessible only from Avencina or the Char) or at the Gate of the Fallen (accessible only from the Arches or the Foundry).

B5: Lord of the Efreets

The heroes make it to the Furnace as the "Through the City of Brass" skill challenge comes to an end. Bashumgarda is at the barracks of the Ring of Fire. The characters must deal with those fanatical guards before facing off against the Lord of the Efreets.

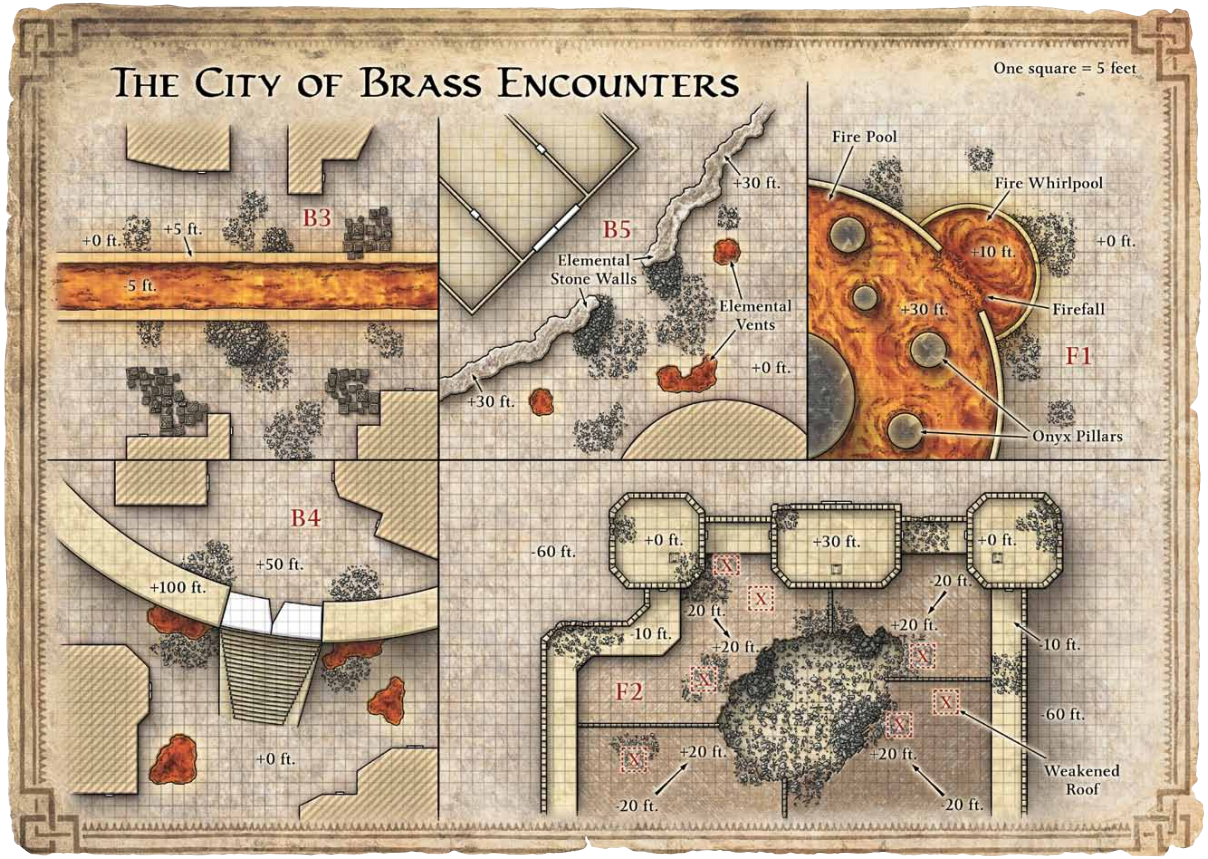
Tactical Encounter: B5. Lord of the Efreets (page 49).

The Call to Battle

With Bashumgarda dead or captured, any other efreets within sight of his battle with the adventurers quickly flee. Word of the fight spreads, but the heroes' immediate concerns will override any threat of retaliation.

The ceremonial scepter Bashumgarda carries is a magic item that controls the gates and the magical wards locking down the City of Brass. If the characters have not learned this from Selerin (see page 25), any Arcana check reveals the scepter's powers. It then takes a DC 33 Arcana check to activate the scepter, allowing the wielder to will the gates open and the city's magical defenses to fall.

The blurred haze above the city shatters like glass. A crack of thunder shakes the ground as the dome of force shreds to gray smoke and ash which is torn away quickly by the wind. In the fading echo, a moment of stunned silence hangs. Then with the collective roar of ten-thousand dragons, the battle for the City of Brass begins.



The heroes are likely to need a short rest after dispatching Bashumgarda, and they have plenty of time to do so. Even as Bahamut's forces pour into the city, however, the scepter bestows information on the adventurer who used it to drop the defensive wards.

The view from the slopes of the Furnace shows that as many efreets are fighting against Tiamat's forces as are standing with them. Estumishu has his insurrection, whether he controls it or not. Just as the powers of the scepter became known to you, so does the corruption that infests it. Like a dark shadow, the knowledge of the pacts Bashumgarda wrought with Tiamat twists through your mind. Those pacts involved more than just fealty and false promise.

The shrine of the Fire Lord Imix at the Eternal Flame Pavilion is a site of great power revered by the efreets. That power has been corrupted by Tiamat, whose foul rituals now siphon off primordial, elemental energy from the shrine to the war dragons leading the battle against Bahamut's forces. With the breaking of the magical wards around the city, similar wards governing the flow of energy through the shrine have also been shattered. If the corruption of the shrine is not ended, the Dragon Queen's armies will drink fully of its power, becoming unstoppable before the end.

Part Four: Bahamut's Fall

The Eternal Flame Pavilion is a shrine to the primordial Fire Lord Imix, but its power has been corrupted by Tiamat. The Dragon Queen had hoped to use the City of Brass as the center of her campaign against the reborn Bahamut, with the power of the shrine fueling dark rituals that will imbue her forces with the raw energy of the Elemental Chaos. Now, only the characters can stop her.

If they have not already done so, the heroes can take a short rest in the aftermath of the previous encounter. They have no chance to take an extended rest before the final two encounters.

Battleground

The battle raging around the characters is epic in both scale and scope, but their focus is on the Eternal Flame Pavilion on the far side of the Furnace. While it is certainly possible to expand this final section of the adventure, doing so is not recommended. The adventurers have no chance to take an extended rest in the heat of battle, and it's likely they'll have already expended resources in the battle with Bashumgarda. Taking on the guardians of Imix's shrine and Tiamat's blue exarch might well be an impossible challenge.

Once the magical wards that protect the city have been dropped, teleportation is no longer shut down within the city. Likewise, with the city's efreets and dragons locked in combat, the heroes can fly without repercussion.

Bahamut's Fall Encounters

As the battle for the City of Brass rages around them, the characters must break Tiamat's control of the shrine of the Fire Lord Imix, then undertake a final battle against Tiamat's blue exarch for the fate of a wounded god.

F1: Eternal Flame

As the adventurers prepare to assault the Eternal Flame Pavilion, Bahamut enters the fray above them.

The battle above and across the city is a maelstrom of draconic fury. Storms of fire and lightning tear the sky, louder than the shrieks of the dying and the roar of the victorious. At the center of the carnage, the great blue exarch Namissi fights with the speed of a creature half his size. Bahamut's forces fall as fast as they can throw themselves at him. The exarch and the war dragons closest to him are surrounded by a shroud of fire, the product of Tiamat's foul magic and the energy of the shrine.

Then, a white light flares to scour the city's shroud of black smoke. Bahamut leads the charge of his exarchs through the sky, smashing into Namissi's forces like a living wave. As Bahamut and Namissi fight, you see and hear the pain in the Platinum Dragon's roar. The aura of primordial fire that Namissi wields can burn even a god! Smoke and flame wrap around both dragons like a shroud.

This is a good place to remind players that Bahamut is still weak from his rebirth. If Bahamut and his forces are to triumph, Tiamat's control over the shrine of Imix must be broken.

Tactical Encounter: F1. Eternal Flame (page 52).

F2: Namissi's Revenge

Still weakened from his rebirth, Bahamut has fallen in battle with the blue exarch Namissi. Only the characters can save him.

Tactical Encounter: F2. Namissi's Revenge (page 55).

Conclusion

With the death of Namissi and the breaking of Tiamat's control over the shrine of Imix, the Dragon Queen's forces are quickly routed by the remainder of Bahamut's army and the forces of the City of Brass.

While the battle winds down, the heroes can descend to the rubble pile where Bahamut is half-buried. Thankfully, their worst fears are soon allayed.

Beneath the fall of rubble, Bahamut still lives. His great sides heave as he draws ragged breaths and his bright eyes slowly open. Rubble spills like water from his scorched scales as, with labored strength, the Platinum Dragon rises.

Though badly wounded, Bahamut is in no danger of dying again. His weakness endures, however, and sets up the events of the final episode in the adventure path.

Champions of Bahamut

The City of Brass has been devastated by the battle, but the efreets will rebuild. With Bashamgurda and Namissi gone, Estumishu quickly establishes consensus among the efreets for his claim to the throne even as he offers his unwavering loyalty to Bahamut. (If the heroes failed the earlier skill challenge, they can take an active role in new negotiations to secure Estumishu's fealty. Having demonstrated their full power, they should have no trouble persuading the new Lord of the Efreets to parley.)

When the battle is done and the characters have taken a well-deserved rest, Bahamut summons them to the ruined courtyard of the Charcoal Palace.

Amid the rubble and ruin, an honor guard of efreets and dragons flanks you on both sides. "Champions," the Platinum Dragon says again, "your bravery has won the battle for the City of Brass. The Dragon Queen's forces are routed, her blue exarch slain. This is a great day ... but I fear it will end again in darkness before the dawn can finally be won."

The adventurers have won the day and saved Bahamut, but their battle against Tiamat is not over yet.

Encounter K1: Slaad Outpost

Encounter Level 27 (64,000 XP)

Setup

1 black slaad overlord (B)
1 red slaad reaver (R)
4 black slaad void nexus (E)

If the black slaad void nexus successfully summons reinforcements, one additional red slaad reaver and four more void nexuses show up as described in Tactics.

The level of ambient noise in the Keening Delve allows the heroes to move along the upper passage unnoticed. The slaads automatically see any characters who draw attention to themselves (including approaching with bright light).

When the adventurers can see into the cavern below, read:

The passageway ends in a steep cliff dropping 30 feet to the rubble-strewn floor of a rough cavern. Four slaads stand to either side of a slab of glowing blood-red stone. Their erratic movements and howling voices suggest that some kind of ritual is in progress.

Perception Check
DC 17: *Another cliff and a steep rubble slope mark a second cavern beyond, faintly lit by a pulsing blue light.*
DC 26: *Two more slaads linger in the distant shadows.*

A dark ritual is in progress as the party approaches. Unless they are noticed, the characters can attack with surprise.

Tactics

In its first round of combat, the black slaad void-howler closest to the teleportation circle makes a *ray of entropy* attack, then steps into the circle and disappears. In the third round, that entropic returns with four other entropics and a red slaad reaver, which step out of the teleportation circle to attack at once.

The overlord stays in constant motion, making *chaos strikes* against lightly armored foes. It uses *black wrath* the first time it can target two or more foes.

The reavers use *reaving leap* as often as possible, making *bite* or *claw* attacks in other rounds.

2 Red Slaad Reavers (R)	**Level 27 Soldier**
Large elemental humanoid	XP 11,000 each
Initiative +22	**Senses** Perception +21; low-light vision
HP 249; **Bloodied** 124	
AC 43; **Fortitude** 40, **Reflex** 38, **Will** 37	
Immune chaos phage (*MM* 239)	
Speed 8, teleport 4	
(+) **Bite** (standard; at-will)	
Reach 2; +33 vs. AC; 3d10 + 5 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the reaver's next turn.	
(+) **Claw** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Disease**	
Reach 2; +33 vs. AC; 1d10 + 7 damage, and the slaad makes a secondary attack against the same target. *Secondary Attack:* +32 vs. Fortitude; on a hit, the target contracts chaos phage (*MM* 239).	
Reaving Leap (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅)	
The slaad shifts 4 squares and makes two *claw* attacks at any point during that movement. If either *claw* attack hits, the target is slowed until the end of the slaad's next turn.	
Horrid Croak (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fear**	
Close blast 5; +32 vs. Fortitude; the target is immobilized until the end of the slaad's next turn.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Primordial
Skills Athletics +27, Stealth +25	
Str 29 (+22)	**Dex** 25 (+20) **Wis** 26 (+21)
Con 25 (+20)	**Int** 13 (+14) **Cha** 18 (+17)

The entropics spread out to avoid area attacks. They use *ray of entropy* whenever possible, falling back on *claw* attacks only when pressed into melee.

Development

If the heroes attempt to flee, they are pursued by any surviving entropics. The overlord and the reavers pursue only if they are not bloodied.

Black Slaad Overlord (B)	**Level 29 Skirmisher**
Large elemental humanoid	XP 15,000
Initiative +26	**Senses** Perception +22; low-light vision
HP 267; **Bloodied** 133; see also *zone of oblivion*	
AC 43; **Fortitude** 40, **Reflex** 42, **Will** 40	
Immune disease; **Resist** insubstantial	
Speed 6, teleport 3	
(+) **Claw** (standard; at-will)	
Reach 2; +36 vs. AC; 3d8 + 5 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of its next turn.	
Chaos Strike (standard; at-will)	
The black slaad overlord shifts 3 squares and makes two *claw* attacks. If both attacks hit the same target, the target loses a healing surge.	
Eye of the Overlord (standard; at-will) ✦ **Teleport**	
Ranged 20; +34 vs. Reflex; 3d10 + 6 damage, and the overlord teleports to within 5 squares of the target.	
Black Wrath (standard; encounter) ✦ **Necrotic**	
Area burst 2 within 10; +34 vs. Fortitude; ongoing 10 necrotic damage, and the target is slowed (save ends both).	
Zone of Oblivion (when the overlord drops to 0 hit points) ✦ **Zone**	
Close burst 2; +34 vs. Reflex; 4d10 damage. The burst becomes a black void until the end of the encounter. The zone blocks line of sight. Any creature that enters the zone or starts its turn there takes 3d10 + 6 damage.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Primordial
Skills Athletics +26, Stealth +29	
Str 25 (+21)	**Dex** 30 (+24) **Wis** 26 (+22)
Con 27 (+22)	**Int** 15 (+16) **Cha** 19 (+18)

8 Black Slaad Voidhowlers (E) **Level 26 Minion Brute**
Large elemental humanoid XP 2,250 each

Initiative +21 **Senses** Perception +15; low-light vision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion; see also *entropic void*.
AC 38; **Fortitude** 39, **Reflex** 38, **Will** 37
Immune disease
Speed 6, teleport 3

Claws (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +29 vs. AC; 12 damage, and until the start of the black slaad voidhowler's next turn, the target takes 5 extra damage whenever the target is hit by an attack.

Ray of Entropy (standard; at-will)
Ranged 20; +27 vs. Reflex; 10 damage, and ongoing 7 damage (save ends).

Nexus Void (immediate interrupt; when reduced to 0 hit points)
Close burst 2; +27 vs. Fortitude; 10 damage, and the target is pulled 1 square. The voidhowler (see below) gains a +1 bonus to its next attack roll.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Primordial
Skills Stealth +26
Str 29 (+22) **Dex** 26 (+21) **Wis** 15 (+15)
Con 25 (+20) **Int** 12 (+14) **Cha** 25 (+20)

Entropic Nexus **Level 26 Lurker**
Hazard XP 9,000

A cloud of shimmering black energy suddenly flares above the blood-red altar, a shrieking roar rising as it advances.

Hazard: The entropic nexus is a magically created gate to the Far Realm. It devours creatures, then spits them back out as horrid abominations. The entropic nexus fills an area 3 squares on a side.

Perception
✦ Perception cannot be used to notice this hazard before it appears. Once the entropic nexus appears above the altar, no check is necessary to notice it.

Additional Skill: Arcana
✦ DC 24: A character can identify the entropic nexus once it appears.

Initiative +23

Trigger
The entropic nexus appears and rolls initiative when any creature except a slaad moves adjacent to the altar.

Attack
Move Action **Personal**
The entropic nexus slides 6 squares toward the nearest nonslaad each round.

Standard Action **Melee** reach 3
Target: A living creature
Primary Attack: +29 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d10 + 5 damage, and the target is grabbed and pulled into a square adjacent to the entropic nexus. On each of its subsequent turns, the entropic nexus deals 3d10 + 5 damage to targets that it has grabbed. The nexus can grab up to eight targets at a time. Make a secondary attack against each grabbed and bloodied target.
Secondary Attack: +29 vs. Fortitude
Hit: The target is pulled into the Far Realm and removed from play. At the end of the nexus's next turn, the target appears in an unoccupied space adjacent to the nexus. The target returns from the Far Realm as a misshapen and horrid version of its former self. It is helpless until a Remove Affliction ritual can be performed, at which point the target is no longer helpless and reverts to its former form.

Countermeasures
✦ A character who is trained in Arcana can engage in a skill challenge to banish the nexus: Arcana DC 31; complexity 1 (4 successes before 3 failures); each check is a standard action. Success in the challenge banishes the nexus. Failure in the challenge causes it to split into two unstable nexuses that occupy adjacent spaces. Each round, each unstable nexus rolls a saving throw at the end of its turn. On a failed saving throw, an unstable nexus winks out of existence.

Features of the Area

Ceiling: 40 feet above the cavern floor; the entrance passageway is 10 feet high.

Illumination: The altar stone and the teleportation circle glow to shed dim light throughout the area.

Rubble: These areas of loose scree are difficult terrain. A creature that runs, charges, or makes a double move through rubble must make a DC 20 Acrobatics check or fall prone.

Altar: A 2-foot-high slab of bloodstained rock serves as an altar to some unnamed Far Realm entity. The altar provides cover and is difficult terrain. If any nonslaad moves adjacent to the altar, an entropic nexus erupts around it. See the hazard statistics block.

Steep Slope: The chamber slopes steeply upward away from the entrance. A creature ascending the slope treats it as difficult terrain. A creature descending the slope or making a melee attack while on the slope must make a DC 20 Acrobatics check or fall prone.

Teleportation Circle: A teleportation circle is set into the adjoining chamber. It is imbued with a permanent Planar Portal ritual that functions only for the slaads. Any nonslaad that moves adjacent to the circle takes 2d8 psychic damage. Any nonslaad that enters or starts its turn within the circle takes 4d8 psychic damage and is stunned (save ends).

Encounter K2: Planar Rift

Encounter Level 28 (69,500 XP)

Setup

1 thunderblast cyclone (T)

Whichever path the adventurers take to approach this cavern, the view is the same.

When the characters can see into this area, read:

An enormous ovoid chamber opens up ahead, its uneven floor split from side to side. This great rift surges with the power of an elemental storm. Fierce winds swirl as gouts of fire and lightning touch the ceiling.

Arcana Check

DC 28: *Pure elemental energy surges dangerously within the rift, but its full power waits to be unleashed.*

6 Shardstorm Icewinds Level 27 Minion Skirmisher
Medium elemental magical beast (air, cold, earth) XP 2,750 each

Initiative +24 **Senses** Perception +20
Iceblast aura 1; each enemy within the aura takes a -2 penalty to all defenses. The area of the aura is difficult terrain for creatures without ice walk.
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 41; **Fortitude** 39, **Reflex** 40, **Will** 38
Immune cold, disease, poison
Speed 0, fly 8 (hover)

⊕ **Ice-Shard Slam** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold**
+30 vs. Fortitude; 15 cold damage.

Vortex Step (move; at-will)
The shardstorm icewind shifts 4 squares.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Primordial
Str 13 (+14) **Dex** 29 (+22) **Wis** 24 (+20)
Con 26 (+21) **Int** 7 (+11) **Cha** 9 (+12)

Perception Check

DC 33: *The swirling wind is more than just a product of the elemental rift. A thunderblast cyclone lurks at the center of the chamber.*

The heroes have ample time to strategize their approach. The elemental rift, however, is a more potent threat than the waiting cyclone. See the hazard statistics block and "Features of the Area" for details.

When the rift activates, read:

A sudden surge of elemental energy shakes the floor and walls of the cavern as the rift flares with a blinding white light. An unearthly shriek heralds the appearance of more elementals. Their swirling forms phase into view within the storm.

Thunderblast Cyclone (T) Level 26 Elite Artillery
Huge elemental magical beast (air, water) XP 18,000

Initiative +24 **Senses** Perception +16
HP 382; **Bloodied** 191
AC 42; **Fortitude** 40, **Reflex** 42, **Will** 35
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 30 lightning, 30 thunder
Saving Throws +2
Speed fly 10 (hover)
Action Points 1

⊕ **Lightning Arc** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Reach 3; +29 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 11 lightning damage.

Lightning Bolt (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Ranged 10; +29 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 11 lightning damage.

Thunderclap (standard; at-will) ✦ **Thunder**
Close burst 2; +28 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 9 thunder damage.

Charged Mist (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Lightning**
Close burst 3; automatic hit; 1d10 + 9 lightning damage, and the thunderblast cyclone becomes insubstantial until the end of its next turn.

Lightning Storm (standard; begins uncharged; recharges when the thunderblast cyclone uses *charged mist*) ✦ **Lightning, Thunder**
Area burst 3 within 20; +29 vs. Reflex; 6d8 + 9 lightning and thunder damage. *Miss:* Half damage.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Primordial
Str 25 (+20) **Dex** 32 (+24) **Wis** 17 (+16)
Con 29 (+22) **Int** 8 (+12) **Cha** 15 (+15)

Three shardstorm icewinds appear each round on the elemental rift's initiative count. When all six icewinds have appeared (after two rounds), the caustic slayer appears (in the third round).

Caustic Slayer Level 27 Elite Lurker
Huge elemental magical beast (earth) XP 22,000

Initiative +27 **Senses** Perception +21
HP 388; **Bloodied** 194
AC 41; **Fortitude** 38, **Reflex** 40, **Will** 38
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 30 acid
Saving Throws +2
Speed 7 (earth walk), climb 7; see also *malleable form*
Action Points 1

⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Acid**
Reach 3; +30 vs. Fortitude; 1d10 + 8 damage, and ongoing 10 acid damage (save ends). If the target cannot see the caustic slayer, it instead takes 2d10 + 8 damage, and ongoing 15 acid damage (save ends).

Eyeburn (standard; at-will) ✦ **Acid**
Ranged 20; +30 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 10 acid damage, and the target is blinded until the end of the caustic slayer's next turn.

Slayer's Fury (standard; at-will)
The caustic slayer makes two basic attacks.

Caustic Breath (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Acid**
Close blast 5; +30 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 8 acid damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 acid damage and is slowed (save ends both).

Sight-Burning Cloud (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Acid, Zone**
Close burst 2; the burst creates a zone of corrosive grit centered on the caustic slayer that lasts until the end of its next turn. When the slayer moves, the zone moves with it, remaining centered on it. Any creature that ends its turn within the zone takes 20 acid damage and is blinded until the end of its next turn. The zone's area is heavily obscured for all creatures except the caustic slayer, which treats it as lightly obscured. *Sustain Minor:* The zone persists.

Malleable Form
A caustic slayer can squeeze through spaces as though it were a Large creature.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Primordial
Skills Stealth +28
Str 24 (+20) **Dex** 30 (+23) **Wis** 26 (+21)
Con 26 (+21) **Int** 10 (+13) **Cha** 9 (+12)

Elemental Rift	Level 28 Blaster
Hazard	XP 13,000

The cavern is split in two by a great rift surging with pure elemental energy.

Hazard: The rift surges with raw elemental power, making it dangerous to creatures that get too close (see "Features of the Area"). In addition, the presence of creatures other than elementals causes the rift to flare up, creating a deadly hazard.

Initiative +24

Trigger

The elemental rift is triggered and rolls initiative when any creature that does not have the elemental origin approaches within 2 squares of it.

Attack

Standard Action **Ranged** 10

Target: 1d4 random creatures that do not have the elemental origin in range.

Attack: +31 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d8 + 10 cold, fire, and lightning damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Special: Once triggered, the elemental rift floods the cavern with unnaturally bright light. Any creature with darkvision must make a DC 26 Endurance check at the start of each of its turns or be dazed. Once a creature makes a successful check, it is immune to this effect. Elemental creatures are immune to this effect.

Countermeasures

✦ With a DC 28 Arcana check (a minor action), a character gains a +2 bonus to Reflex against the elemental rift's next attack.

Tactics

The thunderblast cyclone enters combat only if attacked or when the first creature crosses the rift. It uses *charged mist* and *lightning storm* as often as possible, falling back to prevent creatures from fleeing the chamber.

The shardstorm icewinds spread out against individual targets, avoiding area attacks and maximizing the difficult terrain created by their *iceblast aura*.

The caustic slayer stays at the edge of the fray, making *caustic breath* and *sight-burning cloud* attacks as often as possible. While those powers recharge, it makes double *eyeburn* attacks with *slayer's fury*, falling back into melee only if pressed.

Development

If the characters attempt to flee, the elementals pursue.

Features of the Area

Ceiling: The cavern toward the top of the tactical map is 20 feet high. The cavern toward the bottom of the map is 40 feet high at its center and 20 feet high along the walls.

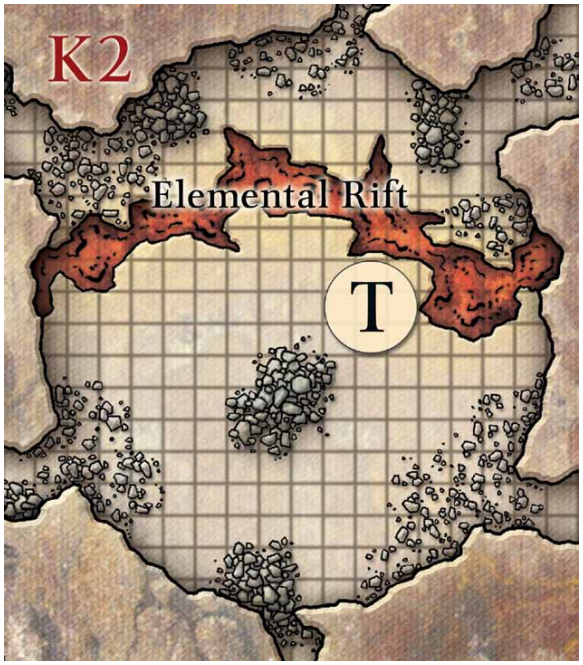
Illumination: When the adventurers first approach, the elemental rift fills the area with dim light. Once the rift is triggered, it fills the area with unnaturally bright light. See the hazard statistics block for more information.

Rubble: These areas of loose scree are difficult terrain. A creature that runs, charges, or makes a double move through rubble must make a DC 20 Acrobatics check or fall prone.

The rubble in this cavern is attuned to the elemental energy surging within the rift. If any creature that does not have the elemental origin ends its turn in a square of rubble, the rocky floor thrusts up beneath it. The creature's space and all adjacent squares become a rubble pile (see below). Any creature in the area of the newly formed rubble pile is thrown into the air and comes down in a random square adjacent to the new rubble pile. The creature must make a DC 31 Acrobatics check or fall prone.

Rubble Pile: Fallen rock and debris are piled to a height of 10 feet. A rubble pile must be climbed with a DC 15 Athletics check.

Elemental Rift: The cavern is split by a rift surging with pure elemental energy. Any creature that starts its turn adjacent to the rift takes 3d8 + 10 cold, fire, and lightning damage. Any creature that flies or jumps over the rift takes 2d8 + 10 cold, fire, and lightning damage. Any creature that enters or falls into the rift is held



suspended by fierce winds, takes 4d8 + 10 cold, fire, and lightning damage, and is immobilized (save ends). Elemental creatures are immune to these effects.

The rift is 10 feet across at its narrowest point. A creature that jumps the rift must take into account the 20-foot drop from the top of the tactical map to the bottom. A creature cannot jump the rift from the bottom of the map to the top.

The rift is a hazard that activates when any creature that does not have the elemental origin approaches within 2 squares of it. See the statistics block for more information. A hero who flies over the rift does not trigger it only if he or she states an intent to fly as close to the ceiling as possible. If all characters cross the rift in this way, or if all adventurers teleport across the rift, it triggers in the third round of combat.

Encounter K3: Primordial Shrine

Encounter Level 29 (91,000 XP)

Setup

1 abyssal rotlord (R)
2 nycademon warmasters (N)
3 kazrith flametongues

Planar energy threads through this ancient shrine, allowing the demons that lair here to create temporary portals across the planes. The characters will make use of a forgotten permanent portal hidden here, which leads to the City of Brass.

When the heroes can see into this area, read:

A nycademon falls back before a foul rotfiend threatening it. Another nycademon lurks close by. The fractured walls of this chamber are etched in endless runes lit by the flaring firelight of a number of lava pits across the floor.

Intelligence Check, for an adventurer who reads Primordial
DC 28: *The runes are an ancient Primordial script. The detail of their meaning is obscured, but this place is clearly a shrine to primordial power.*

Arcana Check
DC 28: *Planar power surges within the stones and the lava vents, the lingering essence of a great portal that once stood here. A disruption to that essence indicates that creatures frequently make use of it, most likely creating their own temporary portals to and from this site.*

Like all their kind, the demons here engage in a constant struggle for power and status, and the present argument has no relevance to the characters' quest. The demons are distracted, however, and gain only passive Perception checks to notice anyone approaching unless the heroes have a bright light source in hand or otherwise announce their presence.

The abyssal rotlord and the nycademon warmasters attack as soon as the characters engage them. Starting in the third round of combat, the kazrith flametongues that lair beneath the shrine are attracted by the sound of combat. One kazrith appears per round at a location of your choice, either erupting from a lava vent or burrowing up through the floor.

Each time a kazrith burrows up from or into the floor of the shrine, that square becomes a lava vent. See "Features of the Area" for more information.

Abyssal Rotlord (R) **Level 29 Controller**
Large elemental humanoid (demon, undead) XP 15,000
Initiative +22 **Senses** Perception +22; truesight 20
Abyssal Fields aura 5; each enemy within the aura cannot teleport.
HP 270; **Bloodied** 135
AC 43; **Fortitude** 41, **Reflex** 39, **Will** 43
Immune fear; **Resist** 20 fire, 10 necrotic, 20 variable (3/encounter)
Speed 6, fly 6 (hover)
⊕ **Skullsplitter** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Reach 2; +31 vs. Reflex; 3d8 + 9 psychic damage, or 2d8 + 9 psychic damage against a bloodied target.
Conjure Abscess (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Ranged 10; +32 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 9 psychic damage, and if the target moves more than 2 squares on its turn, it takes 2d8 extra damage (save ends). If the abyssal rotlord is bloodied, the target takes the damage for moving 1 or more squares.
Floating Despair (standard; encounter) ✦ **Psychic, Zone**
Area burst 2 within 10; the burst creates a zone of dark miasma that lasts until the end of the abyssal rotlord's next turn. Any enemy that starts its turn within the zone takes 10 psychic damage and grants combat advantage to the rotfiend until the end of its next turn. *Sustain Minor:* The zone persists, and the rotfiend can move it 5 squares.
Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common
Str 27 (+22) **Dex** 26 (+22) **Wis** 26 (+22)
Con 30 (+24) **Int** 21 (+19) **Cha** 33 (+25)

2 Nycademon Warmasters (N) **Level 28 Skirmisher**
Large elemental humanoid XP 13,000 each
Initiative +25 **Senses** Perception +22
HP 261; **Bloodied** 130
AC 41; **Fortitude** 41, **Reflex** 41, **Will** 38
Resist 20 variable (2/encounter)*
Speed 6, fly 6 (hover)
⊕ **War Flail** (at-will; standard)
Reach 2; +33 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).
Merciless Flail (at-will; standard)
The nycademon makes two *war flail* attacks.
Snatch (at-will; standard)
Before or after the attack, the nycademon flies 6 squares. Reach 2; +31 vs. Fortitude; the target is grabbed.
Strong Flyer
When a nycademon moves a grabbed target, it does not need to make a Strength attack. While bloodied, a nycademon can fly at full speed instead of half speed when moving a grabbed target.
Alignment Chaotic Evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common
Skills Intimidate +26
Str 28 (+23) **Dex** 29 (+23) **Wis** 16 (+17)
Con 29 (+23) **Int** 11 (+14) **Cha** 24 (+21)
Equipment war flail
* The warmasters have used their variable resistance to give themselves resist 20 fire before the start of the encounter.

3 Kazrith Flametongues	Level 28 Lurker
Medium elemental magical beast (demon, water)	XP 13,000 each
Initiative +28	**Senses** Perception +21; tremorsense 20
HP 196; **Bloodied** 98; see also *magma skin*	
AC 42; **Fortitude** 40, **Reflex** 42, **Will** 38	
Immune fire; **Resist** 20 variable (2/encounter)	
Speed 6, burrow 6 (tunneling), swim 8	
⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**	
+33 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).	
✧ **Molten Flow** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fire**	
Close burst 2; +31 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 4 damage, and ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends). *Effect:* The kazrith burrows its speed.	
Magma Skin (usable only while bloodied) ✦ **Fire**	
The kazrith gains a +4 bonus to its burrow speed, and at the start of its turn, creatures adjacent to it take 15 fire damage.	
Slippery	
A kazrith makes saving throws against immobilized, restrained, and slowed conditions at the start of its turn as well as at the end of its turn.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Abyssal, Primordial
Skills Stealth +29	
Str 27 (+22)	**Dex** 30 (+24) **Wis** 25 (+21)
Con 22 (+20)	**Int** 16 (+17) **Cha** 15 (+16)

Tactics

The abyssal rotlord opens with *floating despair*, then falls back to *conjure abscess* on the strongest-looking melee combatants. It stays close to eladrin characters and other teleporters to take advantage of its *abyssal fields* aura.

The nycademon warmasters throw themselves against the closest heroes, doubling up with *merciless flail* attacks. If pressed, a warmaster uses *warmaster strike* to escape and reposition itself to attack a softer target.

As each kazrith flametongue appears, it moves toward the closest group of characters, then uses *molten flow* to attack and burrow to safety beneath the floor. It repeats that tactic as often as possible, making bite attacks while *molten flow* recharges.

Development

The adventurers can attempt to slay this area's demonic guardians before undertaking the skill challenge to activate the lava vent portal, or they can attempt the skill challenge during combat. If the heroes flee through the activated portal before the fight is over, the demons do not pursue. In addition to awarding XP for monsters killed and the skill challenge, award full XP for any monster bloodied before the characters make their exit.

The Portal of Forgotten Fire

The lava vent in the upper right arm of the shrine is a portal connecting to a secret primordial temple in the City of Brass. The adventurers must activate the portal before it can be used.

Level: 27 (XP 11,000).

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills: Arcana, Religion, Thievery.

Arcana (DC 26, standard action): The hero taps into and summons up the ancient magic of the portal. A character must be within 2 squares of the appropriate lava vent to attempt this check. This skill can provide a maximum of 2 successes.

Religion (DC 31, standard action): The character recognizes the primordial energy powering this ancient portal, and can bend it to his or her will.

This skill can provide a maximum of 1 success in this challenge. No character can attempt this check more than once, and this check cannot be retried if the adventurers fail to complete the skill challenge on their first try.

Thievery (DC 17, standard action): By carefully clearing centuries of carbon ash from the etched stones on the wall above the vent, the character strengthens the magical energy feeding the portal. A character must be adjacent to the appropriate lava vent to attempt this check and takes damage as normal (see "Features of the Area"). This skill can provide a maximum of 2 successes.

Success: If the heroes earn 4 successes, the portal activates for 1 hour.

Failure: If the characters accumulate 3 failures, six shardstorm firewind elementals erupt from the lava vent and attack the closest creatures (including any surviving demons). Use the statistics block for the shardstorm icewinds (page 31), but their basic attack deals fire damage instead of cold damage and ignore the ice walk exemption to the creature's aura.

The adventurers must attempt the skill challenge again. Each additional failed challenge summons three more firewinds than the previous failure.

Features of the Area

Ceiling: 30 feet high.

Illumination: The lava pools shed dim light throughout the area.

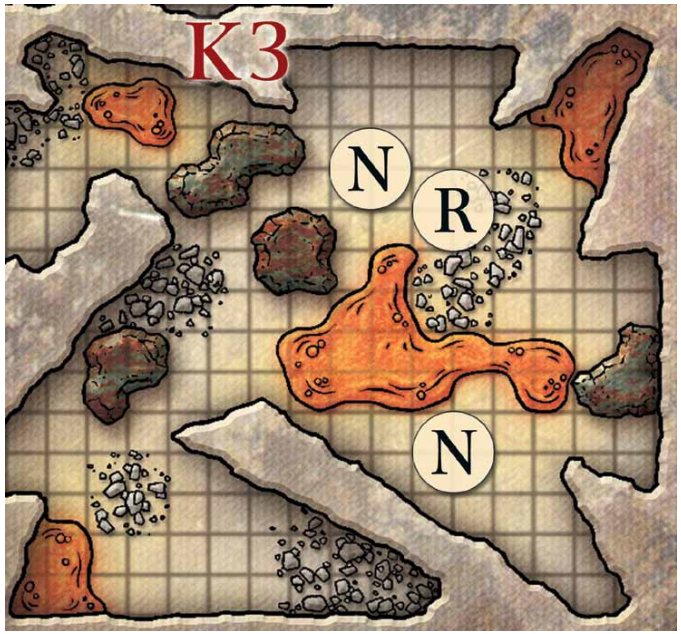
Rubble: These areas of loose scree are difficult terrain. A creature that runs, charges, or makes a double move through rubble must make a DC 20 Acrobatics check or fall prone.

Blood Rock: Areas of mottled red-black stone across the cavern floor are blood rock infused with the energy of ancient battles fought here. These patches of stone do not stand out unless the adventurers make specific attempts to discern them (a DC 28 Perception or Arcana check). A creature standing in an area of blood rock scores a critical hit on a natural die roll of 19 or 20.

Lava Vent: The floor of the shrine has been shattered to reveal pools of blazing lava vented from the Sea of Fire. Any creature that ends its turn adjacent to a lava vent takes 2d6 + 8 fire damage. A creature that enters a lava vent or starts its turn there takes 3d8 + 10 fire damage and is slowed as long as it remains in the area of the vent.

The lava vent in the upper right arm of the chamber is the one that connects to the City of Brass. It takes a DC 31 Arcana check to determine that the lava vent contains the portal, after which the characters must engage in a skill challenge to activate it. See "The Portal of Forgotten Fire," above.

Once the portal has been activated, the heroes can step through it to be taken to the City of Brass (see page 22). The portal sits on the surface of the lava pool, however, and does not confer any protection against fire to those who plunge into it. A creature using the portal takes 2d6 + 8 fire damage.



Encounter B1: Efreet Alliance

Encounter Level 29 (75,000 XP)

Setup

The adventurers make a plea for Estumishu's support of Bahamut's fight against Tiamat. Winning the efreet noble's favor requires more than mere diplomacy.

Estumishu's Favor

In the ritual combat of an efreet Crucible Court, the characters attempt to win Estumishu's favor and to enlist the efreet noble's aid in Bahamut's attempt to rout Tiamat's forces in the City of Brass.

Level: 29 (75,000 XP).

Complexity: 5 (requires 12 successes before 3 failures).

Special: When efreet nobles negotiate, they do so face to face and with scimitars bared in one of the Crucible Courts of the City of Brass. The skill checks in this challenge are meant to be made during ritual combat. See the "Crucible Court" sidebar for more information.

Primary Skills: Diplomacy, History, Intimidate, Perception.

Diplomacy (DC 28): An adventurer undertakes the most direct course of action by attempting to convince Estumishu of Bahamut's respect for his power and the Platinum Dragon's backing of his claim to the throne.

This check covers direct appeals to the efreet noble as well as more subtle flattery of his advisors. A Diplomacy check made directly to Estumishu earns two successes or two failures in the skill challenge. Other Diplomacy checks earn one success or failure in the challenge. This skill can provide any number of successes in the challenge.

History (DC 19): A hero can gain Estumishu's favor by demonstrating an accurate understanding of Bashumgarda's betrayal of efreet history and culture. Each History check made in the challenge (regardless of success or a failure) increases the DC for subsequent History checks by 5. This skill can provide any number of successes in the challenge.

Intimidate (DC 33): The efreets are a warrior culture, and they respect a show of confidence and strength. However, attempting to cow Estumishu into supporting Bahamut is risky. A successful check earns the characters 4 successes in the skill challenge. A failed check earns 2 failures and imposes a –2 penalty on all further Diplomacy or Perception checks made in the challenge. The adventurers can attempt only one Intimidate check in the skill challenge.

Perception (DC 28): The nobles and advisors around Estumishu uniformly despise Bashumgarda, but they have vastly different opinions on how to deal with the efreet lord. With a successful Perception check, a character manages to pick out distinct threads of conversation from the din of the Crucible Court, gaining information and helping shape the course of the negotiations for maximum effect.

On a failed check, the hero's efforts to eavesdrop are noted. This earns a failure in the skill challenge and imposes a –2 penalty on the next primary skill check made in the challenge. Once a failure has been made with Perception, no further checks can be made in the challenge using this skill. This skill can provide a maximum of 4 successes.

Secondary Skills: Arcana, Bluff, Endurance, Insight.

Arcana or Insight (DC 28): A successful Arcana or Insight check represents an adventurers' knowledge of the ways of efreet culture or his or her ability to read specific efreets in the heat of negotiation. A character can make an Arcana or Insight check as part of each primary check made in the challenge. With a successful check, the primary check gains a +2 bonus. On a failed check, the primary check takes a –2 penalty.

A character who fails two Arcana or Insight checks made alongside checks with a single primary skill can no longer make checks with that primary skill.

Bluff (DC 33): Dissent and open conflict is an essential part of efreet diplomacy. Whenever a hero fails a primary skill check in the challenge, another character can step in to berate and belittle the failure. With a successful Bluff check, the primary failure is not counted as a failure in the skill challenge. However, the adventurer who failed the primary check takes a –2 penalty to his or her next primary skill check made in the challenge.

Communication Breakdown

The characters need to keep aware of the delicate nature of their mission to the City of Brass, but the ritual combat of the Crucible Court should keep things moving for those players with more interest in the crash of battle than the language of diplomacy. If the players decide to force Estumishu's loyalty at sword point, they have their work cut out for them. The noble's advisors and followers are two dozen advanced efreets (see the "Crucible Court" sidebar), all of which swarm any heroes attempting violence against their master. If Estumishu is forced into combat, treat him as an elite advanced efreet karadjin (*MM* 100) with a +4 bonus to initiative, attack rolls, and defenses, a +2 bonus to damage rolls, a double attack with *scimitar of horrendous flame*, and 586 hit points.

Endurance (DC 19): The efreets have lowered the normally blistering temperature of the Crucible Court for the heroes' benefit, but the chamber remains uncomfortably hot. A character must make an Endurance check after making a primary skill check in the challenge. On a successful check, the efreets are impressed with the character's stamina, granting a +2 bonus to his or next skill check made in the challenge. On a failed check, the adventurer earns the contempt of the gathered efreets and takes a -2 penalty to his or her next check in the skill challenge.

Success: If the characters earn 12 successes in the challenge, Estumishu accepts their fealty and pledges the support of himself and his allies to Bahamut's cause. The heroes' mission is still complicated by the efreet noble's demands. See "Bashumgarda Must Die" on page 24.

Failure: If the adventurers earn 3 failures in the skill challenge, Estumishu rejects their overtures. The characters still have a chance to win the support of the efreets of the City of Brass. See "Bashumgarda Must Die" on page 24.

The Crucible Court

The advanced culture of the efreets is built around a core of savagery, with the elemental essence of these creatures manifesting in a violent and intrinsically amoral nature. However, the City of Brass has not become the mercantile capital of the planes without a certain amount of statecraft. The efreets are as open to negotiation and parley as any race. Their warlike nature lends a very specific flavor to their diplomacy.

On the streets of the City of Brass, conflicts between efreets are typically settled by a fight to the death. In order to avoid constant bloodshed between their houses, efreet nobles agree to settle trade disputes, personal conflicts, and open challenges in one of the city's many Crucible Courts—a combination bargaining session and combat grudge match. The summit at which Estumishu meets the heroes is a modified version of a traditional Crucible Court, but the principles remain the same. In order to win the loyalty of the efreet noble to Bahamut's cause, the characters must demonstrate not only their skills at diplomacy but their strength in combat.

The adventurers make checks in the skill challenge while undertaking ritual combat against Estumishu's followers on the floor of the Crucible Court (a 20-square-by-20-square open space). These bouts are boisterous affairs, with spectators shouting advice to favored combatants, disparaging enemies, or arguing loudly among themselves.

A Crucible Court bout is run in the same manner as a normal combat encounter, with four restrictions:

- One hero faces off against one efreet in a bout. Combatants cannot request or receive the assistance of allies in any way during a bout.
- Combatants are limited to at-will and recharge powers only, whether from class abilities or magic items.
- Combatants cannot make use of any fire resistance or fire immunity not bestowed by a racial ability.
- A bout is lost by the first combatant to become bloodied or to break one of the above rules. Both combatants are given magical healing to return them to full hit points at the end of a bout. (One exception: If a character in combat makes the failed check that ends the skill challenge, he or she will not be healed by the efreets.)

For each 50 points of damage an adventurer deals in a bout, he or she can make one primary skill check in the challenge. For each 50 points of damage a character takes, he or she takes a -2 cumulative penalty to his or her next primary skill check in the challenge.

Each hero must accept or decline the challenge of ritual combat, stepping up in whatever order the players decide. An adventurer cannot fight twice until all other characters have accepted or rejected a bout. A hero takes a -2 cumulative penalty to all checks made in the skill challenge for each bout he or she rejects.

In each bout, a character faces off against an advanced efreet from the *Monster Manual* (pages 98-100), determined randomly. Adjust each efreet's combat statistics as indicated.

d4	Combatant	Init/Def/Atk	Dmg	Bloodied
1	Fireblade	+6	+3	129
2	Cinderlord	+5	+2	100
3	Flamestrider	+5	+2	129
4	Pyresinger	+3	+1	129

As befits his rank, Estumishu does not face off against the adventurers himself.

The heroes, being outsiders to the City of Brass, have some leeway as regards their appearance in the Crucible Court. A character can make primary checks without undertaking ritual combat, either while another character is fighting or after rejecting a bout. However, each primary check made outside combat takes a -2 penalty.

Encounter B2: Through the City of Brass

Encounter Level 30 (100,000 XP)

Setup

In order to face off against Bashumgarda and grant Bahamut's forces access to Tiamat's army in the City of Brass, the characters must make a dangerous journey across a city preparing for war.

Through the City of Brass

This complex skill challenge provides a framework for combat encounters B3, B4, and B5 and charts the heroes' progress as they make their way across the City of Brass.

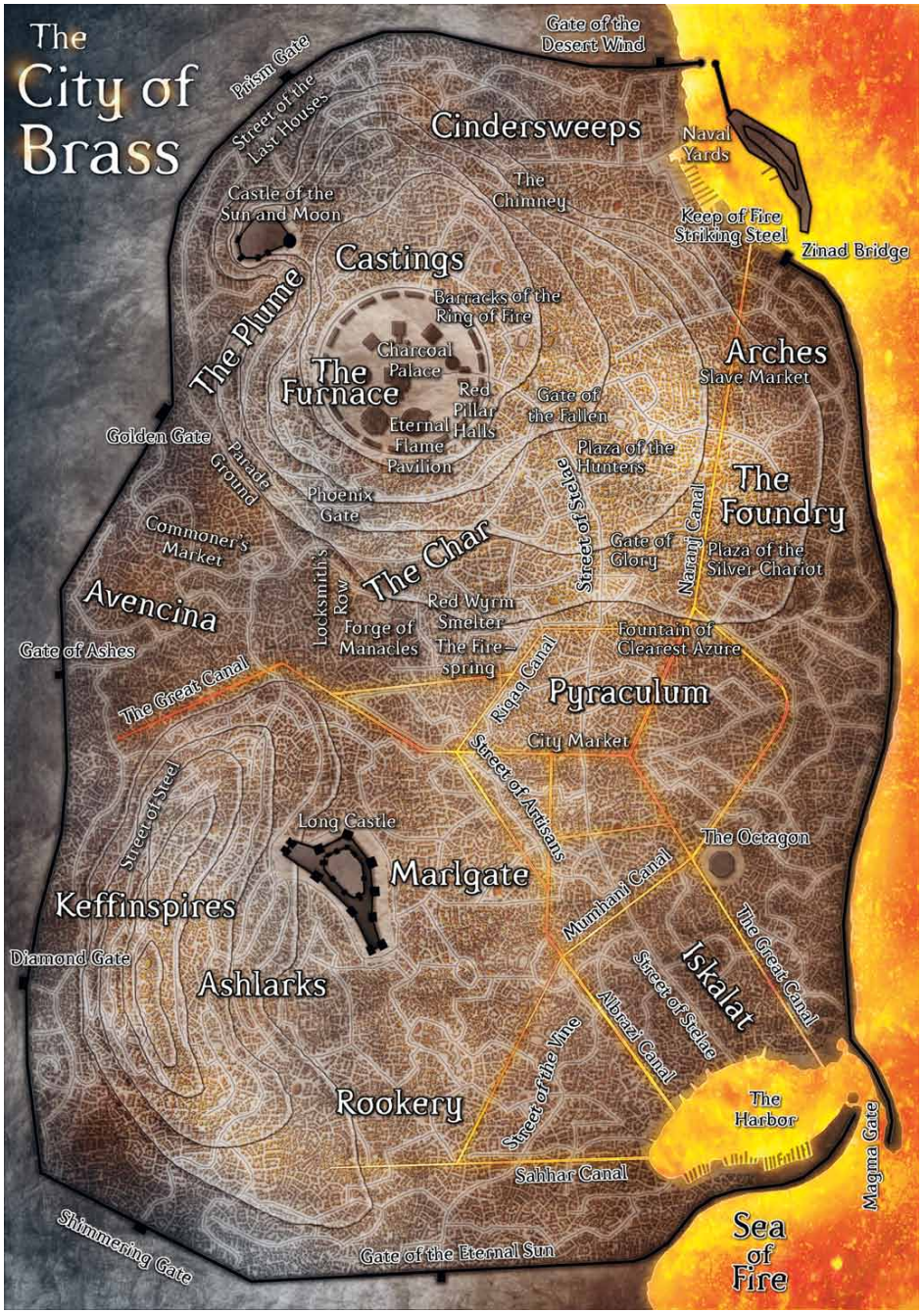
Level: 30 (100,000 XP).

Complexity: Special.

Movement Through the City

The City of Brass is divided into fourteen sectors (see "The City of Brass," below). The adventurers begin this skill challenge in Ashlarks ward, having just left the Crucible Court of Estumishu. Bashumgarda is in the Furnace, holed up with his personal guard in the barracks of the Ring of Fire.

Provide the characters with a copy of the map of the City of Brass and read or paraphrase the information on each city ward detailed below. This represents the intelligence they were given by either Estumishu or Selerin. The players should not be given the different skill DCs for each sector of the city until they begin making checks in that sector. However, expand the general information given for each sector as appropriate to



allow players to consider the advantages and disadvantages of different routes through the city. For example, Marlgate and Iskalat (the wards with low-DC Athletics checks) might be described as having relatively open streets or contiguous roofs perfect for climbing across.

The Skill Challenge

This skill challenge is built on three different types of activity the heroes can undertake: movement within a specific ward, crossing from one ward to another, or avoiding pursuit and confrontation with city guards and the forces of Tiamat.

The skill challenge is built around group checks. At each stage of the challenge, all characters make a primary check using one of the skills noted for that part of the challenge. All characters make checks using the same skill, decided on by the group. In addition to making his or her primary check, a character can also choose to make a secondary skill check using a skill of his or her choice. Characters cannot aid another on any checks.

If at least half the characters succeed on their primary checks, the adventurers earn a success in the challenge. If fewer than half the heroes succeed, the party earns a failure in the challenge. However, this open-ended challenge does not end with 3 failures. See "Success and Failure," below.

Traveling Through a City Ward

The City of Brass is a major cosmopolitan center with a population a half-million strong. Aside from the canals and the wall now sealed around the Furnace (see below), there are no predominantly physical impediments to the party's movement through the city. Rather, this skill challenge represents the characters' attempts to avoid trouble as they seek Bashumgarda.

The adventurers attempt to pass unharried through a ward with a group skill check. All characters make the same check. The ward they are moving through determines the skill check DC, as noted on the "Through the City of Brass" table. A successful group check allows the party to move within the ward. A failed group check means that the characters attract the attention of a passing patrol. See "Evading Pursuit" and "Patrols in the City of Brass," below.

Primary Skills: Athletics, Bluff, Intimidate.

Secondary Skills: Insight, Streetwise.

Crossing to a New Ward

The boundaries between wards are not always clearly defined in the City of Brass. The preparations for war mean that the major thoroughfares, gates, and plazas that mark off such boundaries are under the most intense scrutiny by the city's defenders.

The heroes attempt to cross between one ward and the next with a group skill check. All characters make the same check. Use the higher of the DCs for the two wards the characters are moving between, as noted on the "Through the City of Brass" table. A successful group check allows the party to move into the new ward. A failed group check means that the adventurers are unable to progress past patrols in the area. Characters who fail a check remain in the initial ward and must make subsequent checks to move through the ward again, then to cross to a new ward. Having failed to cross to a particular ward, the heroes do not need to attempt to cross to that same ward on subsequent checks.

Failure to cross into a new ward does not mean that the characters are arbitrarily forced back to their original starting point. Rather, it implies that they must backtrack away from too-numerous patrols, move along the ward boundary to a less well-guarded location, and so on.

Crossing Canals: Crossing the city's fiery canals uses the same group check as crossing to a new ward. If the adventurers' route from one ward to the next crosses one or more canals, crossing between those

The High Road

The party is likely to have access to flying magic at this stage of the epic tier, but they should be very wary of using it in the City of Brass. Dragons and efreets are in constant flight across the city at all times, and although there are fewer enemies in the air than on the ground, those enemies are doubly wary and the characters would be doubly exposed. Almost without exception, the humanoid slaves and residents of the city do not fly, and a party taking to the air attracts immediate attention.

If all the adventurers are able to fly for 5 minutes or more, they can do so to gain an automatic success at a group skill check to travel through a ward or cross to a new ward (including automatically crossing any canals). Doing so, however, incurs an automatic encounter with two patrols. One attacks immediately; the other attacks after 6 rounds. (The first patrol will attack while the characters are in the air if possible, so select an appropriate encounter group.) The heroes cannot elect to make a group skill check to avoid either of these patrols.

Characters who can manage both long-term flight and invisibility catch no breaks in this regard. The haze of smoke that fills the air of the City of Brass immediately gives away the position of invisible creatures flying within it.

wards requires two group checks instead of one. (This check represents the heroes' total efforts at getting across all canals; don't worry about the specific number of canals between wards.) The two group checks can be made with two different skills, at the characters' option. If either check is failed, the adventurers must remain in the initial ward.

Primary Skills: Athletics, Bluff, Streetwise.

If the characters are making Athletics checks to move across canals between wards, a hero who fails a check takes 3d8 fire damage in addition to adding to the group's chance of failure.

Secondary Skills: Insight, Perception.

Evading Pursuit

Adventurers who find themselves attracting the attention of city guards or the servants of Tiamat with a failed group check to move through a ward have the option of fighting or fleeing. If the heroes choose to fight their way out of a confrontation, set up the encounter normally. *D&D Dungeon Tiles* set *DU2: Streets of Shadow* is a great resource for running city encounters. See "Patrols in the City of Brass" for possible encounter groups.

If the characters decide to avoid trouble, they can do so with a group skill check. All characters make the same check. The ward they are in determines the skill check DC, as noted on the "Through the City of Brass" table. If the adventurers succeed on the group check, they successfully avoid the encounter. If the characters fail the check, they cannot escape pursuit and must fight. Regardless of the outcome of the combat encounter, this group check counts as a success or failure in the skill challenge.

Primary Skills: Athletics, Bluff, Stealth, Streetwise.

Secondary Skills: Intimidate, Perception.

Skills

Use the following general descriptions as a guideline for the types of activities the heroes can attempt with each of this challenge's primary and secondary skills.

All checks in the challenge are made using an adventurer's normal skill check bonuses, as each check represents the sum of the character's actions over an extended period. Powers or magic items that grant a temporary bonus to a skill check or affect how a skill is used (including effects such as invisibility) cannot be used in the challenge.

Primary Skills: Athletics, Bluff, Intimidate, Streetwise.

Athletics: The heroes attempt to avoid trouble by moving quickly, by scaling walls or buildings to bypass patrols and guarded intersections, or by jumping roof to roof to avoid the chaos on the city's streets. Athletics also allows characters to cross the city's canals by hopping from barge to barge or jumping the entire breadth of a canal at a narrow point.

Bluff: The adventurers try to keep a low profile amid the chaos by pretending that they are travelers to the city, conscripted to military service during the current crisis and on some errand by order of the city guard.

Intimidate: Fear of the harsh laws of the efreets keeps the folk of the city in line. By making use of this universal attitude of "might makes right," the heroes can bully their way through potential altercations with slave troops and guards.

Stealth: The characters blend in with the movement of the slaves and other non-efreets in the city.

Secondary Skills: Insight, Perception, Streetwise.

All secondary skills in the challenge are made alongside a primary check. With a successful check, an adventurer gains a +2 bonus to the primary check. With a failed check, a character takes a -2 penalty to the primary check.

Insight: By careful assessment of guards and other officials, a character can lessen the chance for confrontation.

Perception: Looking for patterns in the movements of city patrols gives the heroes a chance to avoid those patrols.

Streetwise: By picking up snippets of information overheard in the chaos around them, the adventurers can adjust their route to avoid trouble.

Movement in the City

The City of Brass is far too large to worry about the characters' exact location on a street-by-street basis. Instead, plot the heroes' movement through the city along imaginary lines connecting the legends that mark the rough center of each ward.

Assume that the characters start out at the "Ashlarks" legend on the map. Moving to the "Marlgate" legend requires a successful group check to move through Ashlarks, then a successful group check to cross from Ashlarks to Marlgate. If the first check is failed, the adventurers will need to fight their way out of an encounter or make an additional group check to avoid it. If the second check is failed, the heroes cannot advance but find themselves stuck in Ashlarks.

The characters can attempt to reenter Marlgate by making two more checks—one to move within Ashlarks again, the other to cross into a new ward. Alternatively, they can try another route, for example from Ashlarks to Keffinspires (two checks) or from Ashlarks to Iskalat (three checks, including crossing the canals between those wards).

Adventurers can move between any two ward legends that do not have another legend between them. For example, the characters can move directly from Marlgate to Avencina, but they cannot move from Ashlarks to Avencina without passing through Keffinspires first.

Because of the augmented wall around the Furnace, that ward can only be entered by way of the Phoenix Gate (accessible only from Avencina or the Char) or at the Gate of the Fallen (accessible only from the Arches or the Foundry).

Triggering Tactical Encounters

At three points in the skill challenge, the heroes' movement through the city triggers tactical encounters B3, B4, and B5.

Canal Crossing

The adventurers will cross the city's canals at various points as they head toward the Furnace, depending on their chosen route. At one of those crossings of your choice, go to Encounter B3 on page 45. Other canal crossings are incorporated into the check to move from ward to the next, as described above.

The choice of where to place encounter B3 is entirely up to you, but it works best as the final canal the characters must cross on their way toward the Furnace. Be aware that heroes moving from Marlgate or Keffinspires to Avencina, or from Marlgate to the Char, have only one canal to cross.

When you use Encounter B3, the characters need to cross the canal individually, either during or after the encounter. Do not require or allow the adventurers to make a group check to cross the canal.

Gate Crashers

As the heroes move toward the Furnace, they must pass through the now-sealed ward walls at either the Phoenix Gate (accessible only from Avencina or the Char) or the Gate of the Fallen (accessible only from the Arches or the Foundry). Before they can reach the gates, the characters must first make a group check to move into the Furnace from one of the adjacent wards. A failed check means that they cannot successfully approach the gate but are pushed back into the ward. A successful check made to cross into the Furnace triggers Encounter B4 on page 47.

Lord of the Efreets

In the immediate aftermath of Encounter B4, the adventurers must make a check to move through the Foundry ward. A successful check grants access to the barracks of the Ring of Fire and triggers Encounter B5. On a failed check, the characters meet an efreet patrol that they must either avoid or fight before they reach the barracks and trigger the encounter.

Any penalties the heroes have accrued for failures in the challenge remain in effect for Encounter B5. When Encounter B5 is done, the skill challenge ends, along with all penalties accrued during the challenge.

Success and Failure

The route the adventurers take through the City of Brass and how well they manage to avoid the notice of the city guard and Tiamat's forces determines the overall number of checks in the skill challenge. The challenge ends at the end of Encounter B5, which is triggered when the characters complete the journey to the Furnace.

This open-ended challenge does not end with 3 failures. Cumulative successes move the heroes across the City of Brass and accrued failures en route make the journey increasingly hazardous. Each time the characters incur a failure on a group check in the challenge, consult the "Failures in the Challenge" table. The penalties on the table are cumulative.

FAILURES IN THE CHALLENGE

Failures	Penalty
1	The attention the adventurers draw to themselves by having to face off against patrols or retrace their route makes it increasingly difficult to move openly. The DC of any Athletics check made in the challenge increases by 2.
2	Rumors begin circulating about agents of Bahamut in the city. The DC of all Bluff checks in the challenge increases by 2. All creatures in patrols and tactical encounters gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls and a +1 bonus to all defenses.
3	Word spreads that city guard units are maintaining an active watch for the party. The DC of any Stealth check in the challenge increases by 2.
4	The city guard are ordered to stop and question all non-efreets at large in the city. The DC of any Intimidate check in the challenge increases by 2. All creatures in patrols and tactical encounters gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls and a +2 bonus to all defenses instead of a +1 bonus.
5	Tiamat's agents go on heightened alert in the city. Replace one non-minion from any multiple-creature patrol with an elite dragonspawn (use the statistics blocks from Encounters B3 and B4).
6 +	The heroes are actively hunted by all guard and slave units at large in the city. The DC of any check made in the skill challenge increases by 3. All creatures in patrols and tactical encounters gain a +3 bonus to attack rolls and a +3 bonus to all defenses instead of a +2 bonus.

THE CITY OF BRASS

As detailed in *Manual of the Planes*, the City of Brass is divided into fourteen districts, each with its own specific function and local character. The skill check DCs for this challenge vary according to which ward the party is in. While the characters are unlikely to visit every sector of the city as they make their way from Ashlarks to the Furnace, there are advantages to not simply making the trip in a straight line.

The city is carved up into tiers, many of which are walled. For the purpose of the adventurers' movement across the city, however, there are enough open gates and places to cross that the locations of specific walls and gates are not important. The one exception is the entrance into the Furnace, as noted under "Gate Crashers," above.

THROUGH THE CITY OF BRASS

	Athletics	Bluff	Intimidate	Stealth
Arches	28	28	28	28
Ashlarks	28	33	28	28
Avencina	33	28	33	28
Castings	28	28	19	28
The Char	28	33	33	28
Cindersweeps	28	19	28	28
The Foundry	28	28	33	28
The Furnace	33	33	33	33
Iskalat	19	19	28	28
Keffinspires	28	33	33	19
Marlgate	19	33	33	28
The Plume	33	28	19	28
Pyraculum	28	28	28	19
Rookery	28	33	33	28

Arches: The teeming slave markets of the City of Brass are centered here. The present siege has seen the markets all but emptied, their slaves conscripted to the city's defense. Tiamat's dragonspawn and dragonborn forces have turned the empty markets into ramshackle camps, and most such troops lair here when not on duty.

Ashlarks: The residential sector of Ashlarks is home to minor efreet houses, powerful non-efreet residents, and Long Castle—the base for the city guard. While the guards are scattered across the city at present, private security and watch-dragons accost all nonresidents.

Avencina: This lawless lower-class district is home to the Commoner's Market, the city's largest (and mostly black-market) bazaar. The interior of the ward remains open in the prelude to the attack by Bahamut's forces, but its boundaries with Keffinspires and the Plume are locked down tight by the city guard and private security forces. Dragons perch along the perimeters of the ward but relatively few lurk within it.

Castings: This densely populated barracks ward holds the slave army of the City of Brass. Most of that army now patrols the city, but new squads are being trained here day and night by teams of efreet and dragonspawn.

The Char: Most of the numerous foundries and forges of the city are located in this smoke-shrouded industrial ward. Those forges are presently working overtime in the manufacture of weapons and armor, watched over by dragons and efreet guards.

Cindersweeps: The lower-class free folk of the city congregate here, alongside the harbor garrison's headquarters at the Keep of Fire Striking Steel. Slave troops are currently on watch against possible insurrection, but they are less than focused on the task. Draconic patrols pick up the slack.

The Foundry: The mansions of non-efreets and those efreet merchants and nobles not wealthy enough to dwell in the Plume or the Furnace line the streets of this exclusive residential ward. The Foundry's streets are presently all but empty, but dragons patrol by air and its boundaries crawl with private security forces.

The Furnace: The slopes of the Furnace rise as the heart of the City of Brass. The Charcoal Palace at the center of the ward is the seat of power for Bashumgarda, Lord of the Efreets. The barracks of the

LOCKDOWN

As the City of Brass awaits the arrival of the rest of Tiamat's forces, the city guard spends much of its time locking down the lower-class residential districts. While all the city's folk are subject to emergency conscription to defend it, the efreets are worried about the lower classes taking Bahamut's side if the Platinum Dragon's forces break through.

These lockdowns can be used to provide flavor as the characters make their way across the city, but they also have an important tactical consideration. The area between Avencina and Keffinspires on the left side of the City of Brass Map could allow the heroes to bypass the city's canals (and Encounter B3) as they advance toward the Furnace. If the adventurers approach this area, describe open rioting in Avencina and tell the players that the route around the canal is protected by too many dragons and elite efreet guards to get past. The characters' route through the city must involve crossing at least one canal.

Ring of Fire house his personal guard; government offices fill the Red Pillar Halls. The Eternal Flame Pavilion is an open temple to the primordial Fire Lord Imix, its walls sheathed in beaten gold.

With Bahamut's forces massing outside the city gates, the Furnace has been sealed off. The only way to gain access to that ward is by way of the Phoenix Gate (accessible only from Avencina or the Char) or the Gate of the Fallen (accessible only from the Arches or the Foundry).

Iskalat: This harbor ward contains the city's public docks, serving *planar dromonds*, elemental vessels that ply the Sea of Fire, and the countless captains and sailors who come to the city with cargo and trade. Also here is the great prison known as the Octagon. The harbor is well guarded by red dragons and dragonspawn-led patrols, but much of the rest of the ward is deserted.

Keffinspires: This merchant district is home to many of the city's smiths and metalworkers. All have been conscripted in the production of armor and weapons, and slave troops and city guards move through the ward constantly.

Marlgate: The warehouses of this industrial ward hold the bulk of the goods that move through the City of Brass and across the planes. Bahamut's siege has seen this ward's warehouses stripped for the defensive effort, and the city guard patrols heavily to ward off looters.

The Plume: This exclusive residential district houses the manors and courtyards of the city's most powerful efreet nobles. The Castle of the Sun and Moon is the training ground of the city's elite guard units, and the ward is presently locked down by guards whose loyalty has been purchased by the nobles. Scores of dragons perch atop the district's spires, sending the nobility a subtle signal regarding order.

Pyraculum: The City Market in this commercial sector is larger and more controlled than the Commoner's Market in Avencina. Many of the city's artisans make their homes here. Of all the lower-class wards, only Pyraculum has managed to stay free of lockdown. The air above the ward is thick with patrolling dragons.

Rookery: This residential quarter has a reputation for lawlessness that extends beyond the city and across the planes. Gambling halls, brothels, and gladiator pits are among the least dangerous of the Rookery's charms, and it is said that even the city guards avoid this ward if they can. At present, the city's slave troops are supposed to have the ward locked down, but their watch is tenuous at best. Though dragons and dragonspawn patrol here, they do so less frequently than in most other wards.

Patrols in the City of Brass

As the heroes make their way through the City of Brass, each failed group skill check to move through a ward incurs a possible encounter with a patrol. If the characters try to avoid the patrol, see "Evading Pursuit," above. If they decide to fight (or if they fail in their attempt to avoid a confrontation), choose an encounter group from those listed below or use these groups as inspiration for creating your own encounters. The adventurers earn full experience for any patrols they defeat in the City of Brass.

Open conflict is the norm here, and the brutal reputations of the city's efreet guards and slave troops are well earned. Although any confrontation between the heroes and a patrol will be noted by other residents, those residents will quickly scatter so as to not become involved. Moreover, the chaos that has consumed the City of Brass under Bahamut's siege means that battles between the characters and wandering patrols do not attract the kind of attention they normally would. Unless the adventurers linger at the site of a skirmish, they can safely slip away without attracting further patrols and continue the skill challenge.

Resting Up

The characters can take a short rest after each encounter with a patrol and after each triggered tactical encounter. However, they can take only one extended rest during the skill challenge. Just as the location and condition of specific streets plays no part in the skill challenge, you needn't worry about the specifics of where the heroes decide to hole up for an extended rest. The city's preparations for war mean that many shops and apartments are closed and empty, providing plenty of hiding spots.

Even after reaching the Furnace, the adventurers can take an extended rest before facing Bashumgarda if they have not yet done so. Though the city guards are constantly on the move, many of the Red Pillar Halls are empty; the city's nobles are holed up at their estates in the Foundry or the Plume.

Slave Patrols

The city's slave warrior patrols fight to the death in the name of their efreet masters.

Level 25 Encounter (35,500 XP)
- 2 azer maulers (level 27 controller; page 45)
- 6 genasi blackhearts (level 26 minion brute, page 46)

Level 26 Encounter (49,000 XP)
- 1 salamander thrallmaster (level 28 controller, page 47)
- 8 salamander fireshields (level 26 minion brute, page 48)
- 8 fire archon flamebows (level 26 minion artillery, page 46)

Elite Patrols

Well-trained efreet guards patrol the City of Brass with unceasing vigilance.

Level 25 Encounter (43,500 XP)
- 1 efreet pyremaster (level 27 controller, page 50)
- 1 efreet karadjin (level 28 soldier, *MM* 100)
- 6 efreet magmacasters (level 28 minion artillery, page 50)

Level 27 Encounter (53,500 XP)
- 1 advanced efreet pyresinger (level 27 controller, *MM* 99; +2 initiative, attacks, and defenses; +1 damage; 248 hit points)
- 3 efreet karadjins (level 28 soldier, *MM* 100)
- 9 efreet flamerunners (level 27 minion skirmisher, page 50)

Draconic Disciples

Tiamat's servants patrol alongside efreet and slave forces, intent on ensuring that the City of Brass remains under their control.

Level 26 Encounter (53,000 XP)
- 1 greenspawn defender (level 28 elite soldier, page 45)
- 3 dragonborn champions (level 26 soldier, *MM* 87)

Level 27 Encounter (64,000 XP)
- 1 redspawn magmastomper (level 27 elite brute, page 47)
- 3 dragonborn death knights (level 25 elite soldier, *MM* 51)

Dragon Lords

Veteran war dragons patrol the City of Brass by air and ground in the name of the Dragon Queen.

Level 26 Encounter (45,000 XP)
- 1 ancient black dragon (level 26 solo lurker, *MM* 76)

Level 26 Encounter (45,000 XP)
- 1 ancient iron dragon (level 26 solo lurker, *MM2* 85)

Level 27 Encounter (55,000 XP)
- 1 ancient copper dragon (level 27 solo skirmisher, *MM2* 79)

Level 27 Encounter (55,000 XP)
- 1 ancient green dragon (level 27 solo controller, *MM* 81)

Encounter B3: Canal Crossing

Encounter Level 28 (70,500 XP)

Setup

1 greenspawn defender (D)
2 azer maulers (M)
5 fire archon flamebows (F)
5 genasi blackhearts (B)

As the heroes approach this stretch of canal, read:

While most of the canals you've seen so far have been guarded no better or worse than the streets around them, the stretch of wide channel ahead is a frustrating exception. Dragonspawn-led troops are on constant patrol to both sides of you, leaving only one access point relatively unguarded.

The characters can approach the crossing behind the cover of buildings. Place their miniatures anywhere outside the tactical map.

When the adventurers have moved closer, read:

A hulking greenspawn paces along the near side of the canal, shouting orders at a dozen sullen defenders. Two azers lead separate squads of fire archons and genasi on either side of the canal, watching from cover for any sign of trouble.

The creatures here are all on high alert. They spot the heroes as soon as they enter the area of the tactical map.

Greenspawn Defender (G) **Level 28 Elite Soldier**
Huge natural humanoid (reptile) XP 26,000
Initiative +24 **Senses** Perception +21; low-light vision
HP 514; **Bloodied** 257
AC 44; **Fortitude** 42, **Reflex** 40, **Will** 39
Resist 30 acid; see also *defender*
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8
Action Points 1
⊕ **Greataxe** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison, Weapon**
Reach 3; +35 vs. AC; 2d6 + 6 damage plus 2d8 poison damage.
⸸ **Blastback Strike** (standard; at-will)
The defender makes a *greataxe* attack. If the attack hits, the defender makes a secondary attack against the same target. *Secondary Attack:* +33 vs. Fortitude; the target is pushed 3 squares and knocked prone.
➢ **Poison Bolt** (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Ranged 5; +33 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 8 damage plus 2d8 poison damage.
⸸ **Shield Crush** (immediate interrupt, when an adjacent ally is hit by a melee attack; at-will)
Reach 3; +33 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 6 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of its next turn.
Defender
A greenspawn defender has resist 10 all against damage from dragons, dragonborn, and immortals.
Alignment Evil **Languages** Draconic
Skills Athletics +29
Str 30 (+24) **Dex** 26 (+22) **Wis** 25 (+21)
Con 25 (+21) **Int** 13 (+15) **Cha** 20 (+19)
Equipment heavy shield, greataxe

2 Azer Maulers (M) **Level 27 Controller (Leader)**
Medium elemental humanoid (fire) XP 11,000 each
Initiative +20 **Senses** Perception +21
Azer's Wrath (**Fire**) aura 2; any enemy that enters or ends its turn within the aura takes 10 fire damage.
HP 247; **Bloodied** 123
AC 41; **Fortitude** 40, **Reflex** 38, **Will** 39
Resist 30 fire
Speed 5
⊕ **Maul** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Weapon**
+32 vs. AC; 2d8 damage plus 2d6 fire damage.
➢ **Hurled Maul** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Weapon**
Ranged 20; +31 vs, Reflex; 2d8 damage plus 2d6 fire damage. The azer's maul reforms in its hand at the end of its turn.
Clinging Flames (immediate reaction, when an enemy within 5 squares of the azer mauler takes fire damage; at-will) ✦ **Fire**
The triggering enemy takes ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends).
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Giant
Str 29 (+22) **Dex** 25 (+20) **Wis** 27 (+21)
Con 23 (+19) **Int** 20 (+18) **Cha** 18 (+17)
Equipment scale armor, maul

Tactics

The greenspawn defender fights front and center, laying into lightly armored characters with *blastback strike* while it targets a nearby foe with *acid bolt*. It uses its action point the first time it bloodies a foe to make a followup *blastback strike* against the target.

The azer maulers stay in the thick of combat, maximizing the effect of their *clinging flames* and *azer's wrath* aura.

The fire archon flamebows make ranged attacks from behind cover, reserving their *firestorm* until two or more adventurers can be targeted.

The genasi blackhearts throw themselves into the fray, trusting their *heart of fire* to take out foes that drop them.

The fire creatures here are resentful of the greenspawn's command, and they do not fight alongside it except to flank if possible. The flamebows don't worry about catching the greenspawn in the area of their *firestorm*.

The archons, flamebows, and blackhearts stay on their own sides of the canal. If the characters cross to the top of the encounter map during the fight, however, then the greenspawn tries to jump the canal in pursuit (Athletics +29). The heroes cannot make a group skill check to evade this pursuit.

5 Fire Archon Flamebows (A) **Level 26 Minion Artillery**
Medium elemental humanoid (fire) XP 2,250 each

Initiative +22 **Senses** Perception +21
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 38; **Fortitude** 39, **Reflex** 37, **Will** 38
Immune disease, poison
Speed 8; see also *flame step*

Flamebow (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**
+31 vs. Reflex; 7 fire damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).

Firestorm (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fire**
Area burst 1 within 10; +31 vs. Reflex; ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends). A target already taking ongoing fire damage instead increases that ongoing damage by 5.

Deathstorm (when the flamebow drops to 0 hit points) ✦ **Fire**
The flamebow explodes and is destroyed: close burst 5; targets enemies taking ongoing fire damage; +31 vs. Fortitude; the target and all allies adjacent to the target take 14 fire damage. *Miss:* The target takes 7 fire damage.

Flame Step (move; at-will) ✦ **Teleportation**
The flamebow can teleport to within 3 squares of any fire creature within 20 squares of it.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Primordial
Str 25 (+20) **Dex** 29 (+22) **Wis** 27 (+21)
Con 23 (+19) **Int** 20 (+18) **Cha** 18 (+17)
Equipment chainmail, flamebow

Development

If the adventurers attempt to flee the encounter after crossing the canal, the greenspawn defender and any surviving fire creatures from the top side of the map pursue.

5 Genasi Blackhearts (G) **Level 26 Minion Brute**
Medium elemental humanoid (fire) XP 2,250 each

Initiative +21 **Senses** Perception +19
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 38; **Fortitude** 39, **Reflex** 38, **Will** 36
Immune fire
Speed 6

Falchion (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Weapon**
+29 vs. AC; 10 damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).

Heart of Fire (when missed by a melee attack) ✦ **Fire**
If the target is taking ongoing fire damage, that ongoing damage increases by 5.

Fiery Vengeance (when the blackheart drops to 0 hit points) ✦ **Fire**
Close burst 5; +27 vs. Reflex; 17 fire damage. Additionally, if the target is taking ongoing fire damage, that ongoing damage increases by 5.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Primordial
Str 29 (+22) **Dex** 27 (+21) **Wis** 23 (+19)
Con 25 (+20) **Int** 14 (+15) **Cha** 14 (+15)
Equipment chainmail, falchion

Features of the Area

Illumination: The City of Brass is brightly lit day and night.

Building: Buildings adjacent to the area are of stone construction and from 30 to 50 feet high. Place doors and other openings as you desire. However, unless you wish to develop their interiors, assume that buildings have been magically sealed as part of the siege preparations and cannot be entered.

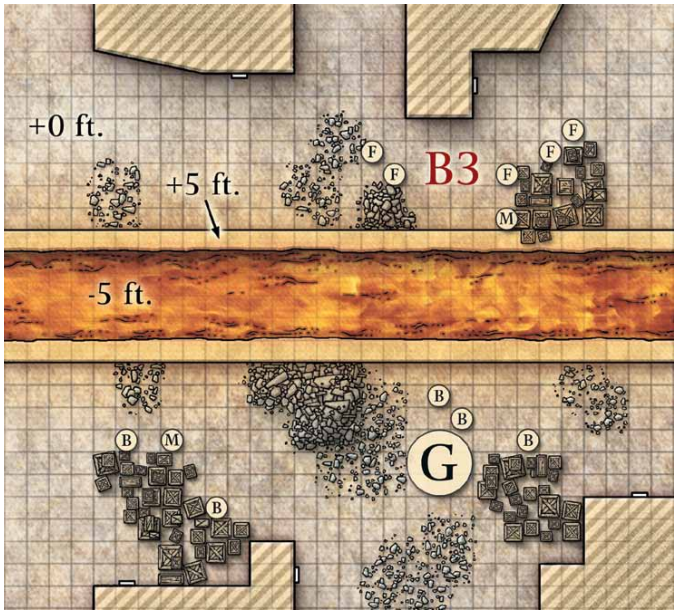
Rubble: These areas of loose scree are difficult terrain. A creature that runs, charges, or makes a double move through rubble must make a DC 20 Acrobatics check or fall prone.

Rubble Pile: Fallen rock and debris are piled to a height of 10 feet. A rubble pile must be climbed with a DC 15 Athletics check.

Crates: Stacks of crates stand 10 feet high and must be climbed with a DC 20 Athletics check.

Basalt Wall: A protective wall of magically strengthened basalt lines the fiery canals of the City of Brass. A basalt wall rises 5 feet above the adjacent ground, while the surface of the canal is 10 feet below the top of the wall.

Canal: The fiery canals that crisscross the City of Brass are a deadly hazard. The canal in this area flows normally, generating intense heat that can be felt from 50 feet away. Any creature that ends its turn on the top of the basalt wall takes 2d6 + 8 fire damage. Any creature that enters the canal takes 3d8 + 10 fire damage and is slowed for as long as it remains in the canal.



Encounter B4: Gate Crashers

Encounter Level 28 (70,500 XP)

Setup

1 redspawn magmastomper (R)
2 salamander thrallmasters (T)
10 salamander fireshields (F)

This encounter takes place at one of the two gates providing the only access to the Furnace. The characters can approach the gate unnoticed behind the cover of adjacent buildings.

When the heroes can see the gate, read:

The wall protecting the inner tier of the Furnace stands some hundred feet tall, a great barrier of basalt and slate whose surface roils with heat and smoke. A huge flight of steps rises from an open courtyard to the gate itself—twin brass valves 50 feet high, their surface flaring with a molten glow. An enormous red dragonspawn slouches by the stairs, its black eyes watching for any sign of trouble. A half-dozen salamanders pace around it, with more walking the wall high above.

Beyond the wall, the dark lines of the Charcoal Palace of the efreets is suddenly lit by a storm of lightning heralding the arrival of the gargantuan blue dragon you saw before. This must be the exarch that Bahamut named as Namissi, descending now to the roof of the palace. Millennia-old elemental stone shudders beneath him as he perches atop a parapet like a bloated crow. His long neck whips side to side, scanning the city as he roars in rage.

The creatures here are all on high alert. They spot the characters as soon as they enter the area of the tactical map.

Redspawn Magmastomper (R) Level 27 Elite Brute
Huge natural beast (reptile) XP 22,000
Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +20; darkvision
HP 612; **Bloodied** 306; see also *fiery wrath*
AC 39; **Fortitude** 41, **Reflex** 38, **Will** 39
Resist 20 fire
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8, fly 8 (clumsy)
Action Points 1

Bite (standard; at-will)
Reach 3; +30 vs. AC; 3d10 + 10 damage.

Explosive Charge (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fire**
The redspawn magmastomper charges an enemy; +28 vs. Reflex; 3d12 + 10 fire damage, and the target is pushed 4 squares and takes ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends).

Fling (standard; at-will)
+30 vs. AC; 2d10 + 10 damage and the redspawn magmastomper makes a secondary attack against the same target. *Secondary Attack:* +28 vs. Fortitude; the target is pushed 6 squares and knocked prone.

Fiery Wrath (only while bloodied) ✦ **Fire**
The magmastomper's bite attack deals 10 extra fire damage, and on a hit the target takes also ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends). The target takes a –4 penalty to saves against this effect at the end of his or her turn if the target attacked during that turn.

Threatening Reach
The redspawn magmastomper can make opportunity attacks against enemies within 3 squares.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Draconic
Str 29 (+22) **Dex** 23 (+19) **Wis** 25 (+20)
Con 26 (+21) **Int** 15 (+15) **Cha** 13 (+14)

Tactics

The redspawn magmastomper enters the fray with *explosive charge*, then makes *fling* attacks each round. It focuses on the most powerful melee combatants initially, hoping to become bloodied quickly. Once bloodied, it lays into lightly armored foes with *bite* attacks, hoping that its *fiery wrath* yields a quick kill.

The salamander thrallmasters fight at range with their *molten lash*, then close with stunned foes for *scourge* or *tail lash* attacks.

2 Salamander Thrallmasters (T) Level 28 Controller
Large elemental humanoid (fire, reptile) XP 13,000 each
Initiative +22 **Senses** Perception +22
HP 262; **Bloodied** 131
AC 42; **Fortitude** 41, **Reflex** 41, **Will** 39
Resist 30 fire
Speed 6

Tail Lash (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**
Reach 2; +33 vs. AC; 3d10 + 6 fire damage, and the target is knocked prone.

Scourge (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**, **Weapon**
Reach 3; +33 vs. AC; 2d10 + 4 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 fire damage and is slowed (save ends both).

Molten Lash (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Fire**
Ranged 20; +32 vs. Reflex; 3d10 damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 fire damage and is stunned (save ends both).

Threatening Reach
The salamander thrallmaster can make opportunity attacks against enemies within 2 squares.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Primordial
Skills Intimidate +23
Str 25 (+21) **Dex** 27 (+22) **Wis** 27 (+22)
Con 30 (+24) **Int** 20 (+19) **Cha** 19 (+18)
Equipment scourge

The salamander fireshields on the wall attack with *flaming javelins* from behind cover. Those on the ground spread out to avoid area attacks, laying into lightly armored foes with *fireshield bash*.

The salamanders are resentful of the redspawn's command. They do not fight alongside it, even to flank.

Development

If the adventurers flee the encounter (either before or after getting over the wall), the defenders on the same side of the wall pursue. The other defenders take 2 rounds to open the gate before following. The characters cannot make a group skill check to evade this pursuit.

10 Salamander Fireshields (F)	Level 26 Minion Brute
Large elemental humanoid (fire, reptile)	XP 2,250 each
Initiative +20	**Senses** Perception +19
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 38; **Fortitude** 40, **Reflex** 38, **Will** 37	
Immune fire	
Speed 6	
⊕ **Fireshield Bash** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Weapon**	
Reach 3; +29 vs. AC; 12 damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).	
↷ **Flaming Javelin** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Weapon**	
Ranged 20; +27 vs. Reflex; 10 damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage.	
↯ **Fireshield Burst** (when the salamander fireshield is reduced to 0 hit points) ✦ **Fire**	
Close burst 3; +27 vs. Reflex; ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends).	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Primordial
Str 29 (+22)	**Dex** 25 (+20) **Wis** 23 (+19)
Con 25 (+20)	**Int** 18 (+17) **Cha** 14 (+15)
Equipment fireshield, 10 javelins	

Standing Down

Not all the natives of the City of Brass are as keen to serve Tiamat as Bashumgarda. During the fight, stress that the salamanders seem indifferent to the redspawn's commands. An Insight check made during combat (as a free action) tells the adventurers that these guards openly loathe the dragonspawn and are fighting alongside it only under duress.

If the redspawn is killed, savvy heroes can attempt to establish a temporary truce with one or both salamander thrallmasters. (The salamander fireshields cannot be parleyed with if both thrallmasters are dead.) Set up an impromptu skill challenge for the attempt: complexity 1 (4 successes before 3 failures), level 28 (XP 13,000); primary skills Diplomacy and Insight (DC 28); the characters must earn at least 1 success with Diplomacy.

If the adventurers succeed in the skill challenge, the salamanders immediately stand down. If they are told that the characters' goal is the overthrow of Bashumgarda and Tiamat's forces, the salamanders open the gates.

If the heroes successfully parley with the salamanders, award full XP for the encounter in addition to the bonus XP for the skill challenge.

Features of the Area

Illumination: The City of Brass is brightly lit day and night.

Wall: The walls of the City of Brass are burning hot. Any creature that comes into contact with a wall or starts its turn adjacent to a wall takes 3d8 + 10 damage. A wall's sheer surface can be scaled with a DC 33 Athletics check, but a creature climbing the wall takes the above damage at the start and end of each of its turns.

A creature at the top of the wall has concealment against foes on the ground.

The heroes are free to fly over the wall, but they draw ranged attacks and will be pursued by the ground forces here.

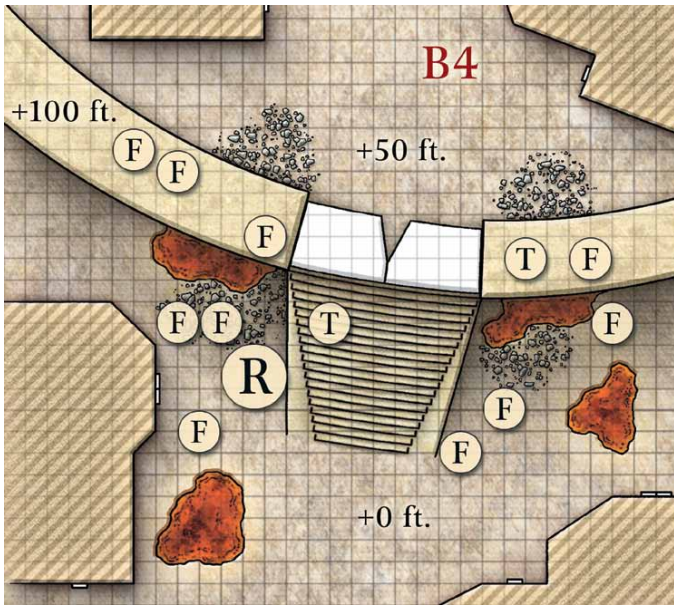
Gates: Glowing brass gates 50 feet high and 15 feet thick block access from the outer city to the inner wards. The gates are molten hot, and any creature that comes into contact with a gate or starts its turn adjacent to a gate takes 4d8 + 10 damage. The locked gates can be forced open by two simultaneous DC 33 Athletics checks. Up to four Medium creatures can attempt Athletics checks to open the gates, but each creature must make its own check (taking damage for contacting the gate, as above). Creatures cannot use the aid another action to assist on this check.

Stairs: A great flight of stone stairs rises 50 feet to the gates set into the great wall. The steps and risers are 3 feet on a side, and are difficult terrain for Medium or smaller creatures.

Elemental Vent: Vents jetting pure elemental energy dot the plaza before the gate. Any creature that ends its turn adjacent to an elemental vent takes 3d6 + 6 cold, fire, and lightning damage. A creature that enters an elemental vent or starts its turn there takes 3d10 + 10 cold, fire, and lightning damage, and is stunned (save ends).

Rubble: These areas of loose scree are difficult terrain. A creature that runs, charges, or makes a double move through rubble must make a DC 20 Acrobatics check or fall prone.

Building: Buildings adjacent to the area are of stone construction and from 30 to 50 feet high. Unless you wish to develop their interiors, assume that buildings are locked and cannot be entered.



Encounter B5: Lord of the Efreets

Encounter Level 29 (92,250 XP)

Setup

Bashumgarda, Lord of the Efreets (B)
2 Ring of Fire pyremasters (P)
9 Ring of Fire flamerunners (F)
6 Ring of Fire magmacasters (M)

Within the barracks of the Ring of Fire, Bashumgarda prepares for the upcoming assault on the City of Brass. The barracks are surrounded by a wall of elemental stone and guarded by a dozen members of the efreet lord's elite personal guard. Nearby buildings offer enough cover for the characters to get a glimpse of their destination.

When the adventurers can see this area, read:

The barracks of the elite Ring of Fire are likely well defended at the best of times, but the efreets have redoubled their efforts in preparation for siege. A wall of elemental stone has been raised around the barracks complex. Its single entrance is guarded by a dozen efreets.

The guards of the Ring of Fire are on high alert. Any heroes moving in the open are spotted as soon as they move onto the tactical map.

The magmacasters and one pyremaster are hovering just behind the wall. They maintain clear line of sight to approaching foes but have superior cover against attacks from the front of the wall.

The guards at the wall call out an alarm as soon as combat begins. Bashumgarda and five flamerunners are inside the closest barracks building. They emerge on their initiative count 2 rounds later.

When Bashumgarda emerges, read:

The great doors of the closest barracks building are suddenly flung wide and five more Ring of Fire flamerunners rush forward to join their comrades. Behind them strides the menacing figure of Bashumgarda, Lord of the Efreets. The ceremonial scepter of his reign hangs at his belt and the scimitar in his hands pulses with black flame as he shouts out, "Defilers and infidels! You will pay for treachery with your lives!"

Tactics

Bashumgarda wastes no time plunging into battle to hit as many characters as possible with *burning wrath* as he advances. He focuses on the strongest-looking defender or leader, moving to another target each time he successfully hits with a *blackflame scimitar* attack.

The pyremasters each open with *wall of fire*, setting up a hazardous gauntlet around the adventurers that they sustain each round. They use their *pyremaster's lash* against strikers and defenders, switching to *spiked scimitar* attacks while *pyremaster's lash* recharges. If surrounded, they use *fire burst* before moving to a more advantageous position.

The flamerunners spread out to avoid area attacks, staying in motion with *blazing charge* and *fiery escape*.

The magmacasters unleash their magma bolts against ranged attackers and spellcasters, targeting characters demonstrating resistance to fire with *molten wave*.

Bashumgarda, Lord of the Efreets (B) — **Level 28 Elite Soldier (Leader)**
Large elemental humanoid (fire), efreet — XP 26,000
Initiative +24 **Senses** Perception +26
Efreet Lord's Aura aura 2; while within the aura, allies gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls with fire attacks, and enemies gain vulnerable 5 fire.
HP 520; **Bloodied** 260
AC 44; **Fortitude** 40, **Reflex** 39, **Will** 41
Immune fire
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6, fly 8 (hover)
Action Points 1

⊕ **Blackflame Scimitar** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Necrotic, Weapon**
Reach 2; +35 vs. AC; 2d10 + 9 damage (crit 6d10 + 29) plus 1d10 fire and necrotic damage, and the target takes ongoing 15 fire and necrotic damage and is immobilized (save ends both). *Aftereffect:* Ongoing 15 fire and necrotic damage (save ends). Saving throws against this power take a -2 penalty.

Double Attack (standard; at-will)
Bashumgarda makes two *blackflame scimitar* attacks.

Burning Wrath (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fire**
Area burst 2 within 10; targets enemies; +33 vs. Will; 3d10 + 5 fire damage, and the target is blinded (save ends).

Fiery Vendetta (immediate reaction, when an enemy within 2 squares of Bashumgarda attacks one of Bashumgarda's allies; at-will)
Bashumgarda makes a melee basic attack against the triggering enemy.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Primordial
Skills Diplomacy +29, Intimidate +29
Str 26 (+22) **Dex** 26 (+22) **Wis** 25 (+21)
Con 28 (+23) **Int** 25 (+21) **Cha** 31 (+24)
Equipment scimitar

No Quarter

Bashumgarda and his elite guards fight to the death, but the heroes might not be so quick to want to see the efreet lord fall. Depending on the outcome of the "Efreet Alliance" skill challenge (Encounter B1) and the party's moral bent, Bashumgarda might be kept alive for questioning or to be delivered up to Bahamut. If subdued with any amount of care, the efreet lord rages and rails against his captors but poses no further threat.

9 Ring of Fire Flamerunners (F) **Level 27 Minion Skirmisher**
Large elemental humanoid (fire), efreet XP 2,750 each

Initiative +24 **Senses** Perception +20
Ring of Fire aura 2; enemies within the aura takes a -5 penalty to saving throws to end ongoing fire damage.
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 41 (43 against opportunity attacks); **Fortitude** 39, **Reflex** 41, **Will** 38
Immune fire
Speed 6, fly 8 (hover)

⊕ **Scimitar** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Weapon**
Reach 2; +32 vs. AC; 10 damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends). If used as part of a charge, increase the ongoing damage to ongoing 10 fire damage.

Fiery Escape (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
The flamerunner teleports 20 squares adjacent to another efreet, reappearing in a flash of fire and smoke.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Primordial
Str 26 (+21) **Dex** 29 (+22) **Wis** 24 (+20)
Con 22 (+19) **Int** 17 (+16) **Cha** 20 (+18)
Equipment scimitar

Development

The characters' victory over Bashumgarda allows them to use his scepter to open the City of Brass to Bahamut's forces. See "The Call to Battle" on page 26.

2 Ring of Fire Pyremasters (P) **Level 27 Controller**
Large elemental humanoid (fire), efreet XP 11,000 each

Initiative +21 **Senses** Perception +17
Ring of Fire aura 2; any enemy that enters or ends its turn in the aura takes 10 fire damage.
HP 250; **Bloodied** 125
AC 41; **Fortitude** 40, **Reflex** 38, **Will** 38
Immune fire
Speed 6, fly 8 (hover)

⊕ **Spiked Scimitar** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Weapon**
Reach 2; +32 vs. AC; 2d10 + 9 damage (crit 6d10 + 29), and the target is slowed until the end of its next turn.

Pyremaster's Lash (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Fire**
Ranged 10; +31 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 7 fire damage, and the target slides 3 squares, takes ongoing 10 fire damage, and is immobilized (save ends both).

Fire Burst (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**
Area burst 1 within 10; +32 vs. AC; 3d6 + 7 fire damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).

Wall of Fire (standard; recharges when bloodied) ✦ **Fire**
Area wall 10 within 20; the pyremaster conjures a wall of searing flame that lasts until the end of the pyremaster's next turn. The wall is 6 squares high and blocks line of sight. The wall's space is heavily obscured and is difficult terrain. A creature that starts its turn adjacent to the wall takes 10 fire damage. A creature that enters a square of the wall or starts its turn there takes 20 fire damage. *Sustain Minor:* The wall persists.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Primordial
Skills Arcana +25, Insight +24, Intimidate +27
Str 29 (+22) **Dex** 26 (+21) **Wis** 19 (+17)
Con 26 (+21) **Int** 21 (+18) **Cha** 26 (+21)
Equipment scimitar

Treasure

With Bashumgarda defeated, the adventurers can seize both the ceremonial scepter of his reign and his *blackflame scimitar*. If you choose to place this unique weapon as treasure, treat it as a +6 *flaming scimitar* that can deal fire damage, necrotic damage, or both. If you do not wish to use it as treasure, the *blackflame scimitar* is usable only by another efreet.

6 Ring of Fire Magmacasters (M) **Level 28 Minion Artillery**
Large elemental humanoid (fire), efreet XP 3,250 each

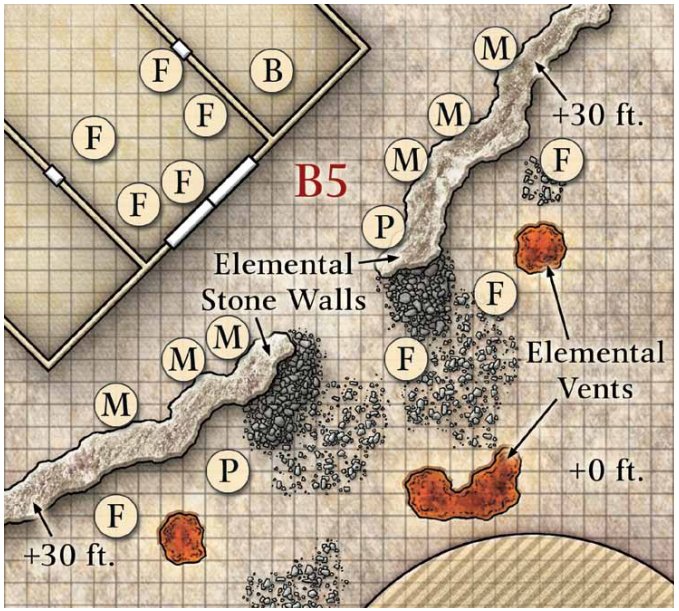
Initiative +24 **Senses** Perception +19
Ring of Fire aura 2; any enemy that ends its turn within the aura takes 5 fire damage.
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 40; **Fortitude** 39, **Reflex** 42, **Will** 40
Immune fire
Speed 6, fly 8 (hover)

Magma Bolt (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**
Ranged 10; +33 vs. AC; 10 fire damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).

Molten Wave (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fire**
Ranged 10; +33 vs. Reflex; the target gains vulnerable 15 fire damage (save ends).

Magma Spray (when reduced to 0 hp; encounter) ✦ **Fire**
The magmacaster's space and all adjacent squares become difficult terrain until the end of the encounter. A creature that enters these squares takes 5 fire damage.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Primordial
Str 25 (+21) **Dex** 31 (+24) **Wis** 20 (+19)
Con 22 (+20) **Int** 20 (+19) **Cha** 26 (+22)



Features of the Area

Illumination: The City of Brass is brightly lit day and night.

Wall of Elemental Stone: The barracks complex of the Ring of Fire has been surrounded by a cordon of elemental stone for protection. This rough stone wall is 60 feet high, 10 feet thick, and can be climbed with a DC 19 Athletics check. Any creature that comes into contact with the wall or starts its turn there is pummeled by the wall and subject to an attack: +33 vs. Reflex; 3d8 + 10 damage, and the target falls from the wall and is knocked prone. A creature that falls from the wall takes additional falling damage as normal.

The heroes are free to fly over the wall, but they draw ranged attacks and will be pursued by the ground forces here. The total flying distance from one side of the wall to the other is 130 feet (26 squares).

Rubble: These areas of loose scree are difficult terrain. A creature that runs, charges, or makes a double move through rubble must make a DC 20 Acrobatics check or fall prone.

Rubble Pile: Fallen rock and debris are piled to a height of 20 feet. A rubble pile must be climbed with a DC 15 Athletics check.

Elemental Vent: Vents jetting pure elemental energy dot the area before the wall. Any creature that ends its turn adjacent to an elemental vent takes 3d6 + 6 cold, fire, and lightning damage. A creature that enters an elemental vent or starts its turn there takes 3d10 + 10 cold, fire, and lightning damage, and is stunned (save ends).

Each round on initiative count 0, roll a d10 for each elemental vent. On a roll of 10, the vent flares up unpredictably. Any creature adjacent to the vent takes 3d8 + 8 fire damage.

Building: Buildings adjacent to the area are of stone construction and from 30 to 50 feet high. Bashumgarda and his Ring of Fire guards do not retreat into the barracks complex, but the characters are welcome to. If they do, expand the tactical map with efreet-sized stone furnishings as appropriate.

Encounter F1: Eternal Flame

Encounter Level 29 (92,500 XP)

Setup

1 white dragon firelord (W)
6 efreet scalespawn (S)

Tiamat's forces are drawing power from the shrine of the Eternal Flame Pavilion. This area is protected by powerful wards and guarded by a white dragon firelord and a half-dozen scalespawn—efreets bestowed with draconic qualities by Tiamat's foul rituals.

As the adventurers approach this area, read:

Pools of elemental fire surround the Eternal Flame Pavilion, the beaten gold of its walls glowing daylight-bright. However, that light is shrouded by the haze of a protective dome of magical force that surrounds the shrine on all sides.

Elemental fire pours forth from the pavilion's main pool, hissing like a waterfall into a smaller constrained whirlpool. Pillars of black onyx jut up from the larger pool of roiling fire, the largest of these the perch of a huge dragon. The creature is an elder white by its appearance. However, its scales and eyes pulse with a blood-red glow and clouds of steam surround it as it paces. A half-dozen efreets stand before the shrine, but these are no ordinary guards. Tiamat's rituals have reshaped them into foul draconic forms. Smoke and fire shroud them as they flex deadly scaled ridges along their backs and limbs.

These creatures are on high alert and are ready to meet any attackers attempting to break Tiamat's control over Imix's shrine. The scalespawn hold their positions until the heroes are close enough to attack. The white dragon firelord does not leave the large pillar until the first character enters the area of the larger pool.

White Dragon Firelord (W) **Level 28 Solo Brute**
Huge natural magical beast (dragon) **XP 65,000**
Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +19; darkvision
Fire and Ice aura 5; while within the aura, enemies gain vulnerable 15 cold and vulnerable 15 fire.
HP 1,048; **Bloodied** 524; see also *bloodied breath*
AC 42; **Fortitude** 43, **Reflex** 40, **Will** 40
Resist 30 cold, fire
Saving Throws +5
Speed 8 (ice walk), fly 8 (hover), overland flight 12
Action Points 2

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold**
Reach 3; +33 vs. AC; 2d12 + 6 plus 2d12 cold damage (plus an extra 2d12 cold damage on a successful opportunity attack).

⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**
Reach 3; +33 vs. AC; 1d12 + 6 damage plus 1d12 fire damage.

Dragon's Fury (standard; at-will)
The dragon makes two *claw* attacks. If the dragon hits a single target with both claws, it makes a *bite* attack against the same target.

Scouring Bolt (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Cold, Fire**
Ranged 10; +31 vs. Fortitude; 2d12 + 10 cold and fire damage, and the firelord slides the target 2 squares.

Breath Weapon (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Cold, Fire**
Close blast 5; +31 vs. Reflex; 5d10 + 10 cold and fire damage, and the target is knocked prone and blinded (save ends both).

Bloodied Breath (free, when first bloodied; encounter)
The dragon's breath weapon recharges, and the dragon uses it.

Frightful Presence (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fear**
Close burst 10; targets enemies; +31 vs. Will; the target is stunned until the end of the dragon's next turn. *Aftereffect:* The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Steam Shroud (immediate interrupt, when hit by a melee attack; at-will) ✦ **Zone**
The dragon's space and all adjacent squares become a zone of roiling steam that grants total concealment until the end of the dragon's next turn.

Elemental Affinity
The white dragon firelord's elemental power overcomes the fire affinity of the City of Brass. The dragon's attacks with the cold keyword deal full damage.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Athletics +28, Intimidate +27
Str 28 (+23) **Dex** 21 (+19) **Wis** 20 (+19)
Con 30 (+24) **Int** 26 (+22) **Cha** 26 (+22)

Tactics

The efreet scalespawns race shrieking into battle, spreading out to avoid area attacks. They use their *breath weapon* against mobile combatants, focusing scimitar attacks on more stationary, lightly armored foes.

The white dragon firelord stays in the thick of combat to make maximum use of its *fire and ice* aura. It focuses its *dragon's fury* attacks on lightly armored foes and uses its *breath weapon* and *scouring bolt* as often as possible. Against a bloodied target, it spends an action point to make two *dragon's fury* attacks, hoping for a quick kill.

6 Efreet Scalespawn (S)	Level 27 Minion Soldier
Large elemental humanoid (fire)	XP 2,750 each
Initiative +22	**Senses** Perception +20
Scaled Wrath aura 1; any creature that attacks a scalespawn while adjacent to it takes 10 damage.	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 43; **Fortitude** 40, **Reflex** 38, **Will** 38	
Immune fire	
Speed 6, fly 8 (hover)	
⊕ **Scimitar** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon** Reach 2; +34 vs. AC; 14 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the efreet scalespawn's next turn.	
✧ **Breath Weapon** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fire** Close burst 2; +32 vs. Reflex; 14 fire damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).	
✧ **Vengeful Immolation** (when the scalespawn drops to 0 hit points) ✦ **Fire** Close burst 5; +32 vs. Fortitude; the target is pushed 1 square and takes ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends). The scalespawn is destroyed, and its space and all adjacent squares become difficult terrain until the end of the encounter.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Primordial
Str 29 (+22)	**Dex** 25 (+20) **Wis** 24 (+20)
Con 27 (+21)	**Int** 18 (+17) **Cha** 21 (+18)
Equipment scimitar	

Corrupted Shrine

The Dragon Queen's ritualists have corrupted the shrine of Imix in the Eternal Flame Pavilion, drawing off primordial power that gives strength to Tiamat's blue exarch and his war dragons. The adventurers must break the control of the shrine in order to tip the odds to Bahamut's side.

Level: 27 (XP 11,000).

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills: Arcana, Athletics, Religion.

Arcana (DC 26, standard action): By sensing the disruption in the primordial magic of the shrine, the character can attempt to correct it. A character must be within the area of the fire pool or the fire whirlpool to attempt this check. This skill can provide a maximum of 2 successes.

Athletics (DC 17, standard action): The primordial power of the shrine responds to displays of sheer force. By striking one of the onyx altars hard enough, the hero weakens the control of Tiamat's rituals. A character must be on or adjacent to an onyx pillar to attempt this check. This skill can provide a maximum of 2 successes.

Religion (DC 31, standard action): The adventurer can make an offering of fealty to Imix in an attempt to overcome the corruption of Tiamat. This check can be made from outside the area of the fire pool and the fire whirlpool. This skill can provide a maximum of 2 successes.

Any divine character who is successful in this check disrupts the connection to the power of his or her own faith. Such a character takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls and any subsequent skill checks in this challenge (save ends).

Secondary Skill: Endurance.

Endurance (DC 26, free action or minor action): The searing heat of the pools hinders the characters in their attempts to undo the corruption of the shrine. With a successful Endurance check, a hero gains a +2 bonus to his or her next primary skill check made in the challenge. On a failed Endurance check, the character takes a –2 penalty to his or her next primary check.

Any adventurer undertaking the skill challenge must attempt an Endurance check as a free action before making a primary skill check. Alternatively, a character can instead make the Endurance check as a minor action before the primary check. An Endurance check made as a minor action grants the hero a +2 bonus on the check.

Success: If the characters earn 4 successes, Tiamat's corruption of the shrine is broken. Any surviving creatures in this encounter take a –2 penalty to all defenses, as does the blue exarch in encounter F2.

Failure: If the characters accumulate 3 failures, they succeed only in accelerating the rate at which power is drained from the shrine. The white dragon firelord regains 262 hit points (or returns to life with that many hit points if it has been slain). The firelord and any other surviving creatures in this encounter gain a +2 bonus to all defenses and a +2 bonus to attack rolls until the end of the encounter.

Development

Partway through the adventurers' fight here, bring the player's attention back to the overall battle, where Bahamut and Namissi continue their bloody melee.

When the white dragon firelord is first bloodied, read the following:

Beyond the Eternal Flame Pavilion, the great Charcoal Palace is suddenly lit by a storm of blue-white lightning. The blue exarch Namissi is still locked in combat with Bahamut, and the Platinum Dragon's form is burning like a reflection of the city below. Both are badly wounded as they slam into each other in midair, crashing into one of the palace's high spires as they twist in a deadly embrace.

Continue to describe the battle between Bahamut and Namissi as this encounter plays out. Stress the proximity of both combatants to the Charcoal Palace, and describe the palace taking the brunt of their attacks as they skirmish around it. Also describe Namissi appearing suddenly weakened if the characters are successful in the skill challenge.

Aftermath

As soon as this encounter ends, the heroes see Bahamut fall under the onslaught of Tiamat's blue exarch.

From the Charcoal Palace comes a sudden shuddering roar. In a blast of lightning from Namissi, the peaked roof of one great wing of the complex collapses where the blue exarch and Bahamut coil around each other. A cloud of dust and black smoke rises, eclipsing the view before being suddenly shredded by the beating of great wings. Bahamut is gone. Namissi perches at the uppermost parapet of the shattered palace, his victorious roar echoing across the City of Brass.

Still weakened from his rebirth, Bahamut has fallen and the adventurers are the only ones who can save him. Go to encounter F2 on the next page.

Features of the Area

Illumination: The City of Brass is brightly lit day and night.

Rubble: These areas of loose scree are difficult terrain. A creature that runs, charges, or makes a double move through rubble must make a DC 20 Acrobatics check or fall prone.

Fire Pool: The shrine of Imix at the heart of the Eternal Flame Pavilion is surrounded by onyx-walled pools of pure elemental fire. The largest of these pools is the center of Tiamat's corrupt rituals and is protected by a dome of magical force. The only entrance into the fire pool is by way of the firefall that descends into the fire whirlpool (see below).

The roiling elemental fire of the pool is interrupted by a series of onyx pillars (see below). Any creature that starts its turn in the air above the fire pool must make a DC 28 Endurance check (a free action) or take 3d8 + 10 fire damage. Any creature that enters or starts its turn within the fire pool takes 4d8 + 10 fire damage.

The protective dome of magical force that surrounds the fire pool blocks movement, line of effect, and magic (including teleportation effects). Creatures can enter the fire pool only by way of the smaller whirlpool and the firefall; see below.

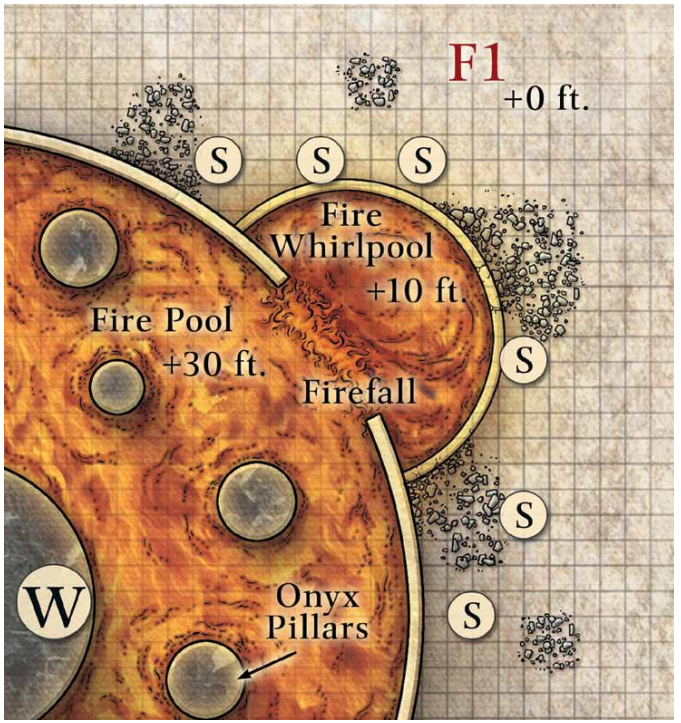
Onyx Pillar: Rough-topped pillars of magical onyx thrust up 5 feet above the roiling surface of the fire pool, including one large pillar that is the centerpiece of Tiamat's rituals. A creature standing on an onyx pillar is partially protected from the crippling heat of the fire pool. Any creature that starts its turn on or above an onyx pillar must make a DC 28 Endurance check (a free action) or take 2d8 + 5 fire damage.

Firefall: Raw elemental fire surges like a waterfall down from the fire pool. The firefall is the only access from the open whirlpool to the warded fire pool. The 20-foot-high firefall can be ascended by flying or with a DC 33 Athletics check. A creature that flies up the firefall takes 3d8 + 10 fire damage. A creature that ascends the firefall with an Athletics check takes 4d8 + 10 fire damage.

Fire Whirlpool: Where the flow of fire courses down from the larger fire pool, it creates an elemental vortex. The smooth onyx walls of the whirlpool are 10 feet high and can be climbed with a DC 20 Athletics check. A creature that ends its turn on the onyx wall takes 2d6 + 8 fire damage.

Any creature that enters or starts its turn in the whirlpool takes 3d8 + 10 fire damage and is dazed until the start of its next turn. A creature that moves 1 square into the whirlpool must make a DC 19 Acrobatics or Athletics check (a standard action) to grab the edge and clamber onto the wall. A creature that fails its check or that moves more than 1 square into the whirlpool is caught up in the vortex.

A creature must make a DC 28 Acrobatics or Athletics check (a standard action) to escape the vortex. One creature on the wall can aid this check. On a creature's third failed check to escape the vortex, it is pulled down within the elemental maelstrom and irrevocably destroyed.



Encounter F2: Namissi's Revenge

Encounter Level 32 (135,000 XP)

Setup

Namissi, blue exarch of Tiamat (N)
Bahamut, the Platinum Dragon (B)

Immediately after their victory at the Eternal Flame Pavilion, the characters must rush to the Charcoal Palace to face off against Namissi, the blue exarch of Tiamat. Bahamut has been gravely wounded and lies in the ruins of the palace. Namissi stands triumphant, his forces about to overwhelm Bahamut's shattered army.

Last Stand

The focus of this battle is Namissi facing off against the adventurers. Bahamut's fall threatens to tip the balance of power in favor of the blue exarch's forces. However, Namissi knows better than to risk Tiamat's wrath by slaying the weakened Platinum Dragon outright, expecting that the Dragon Queen will want to reserve that honor for herself.

However, if you want to increase the tension of this encounter beyond the combat, you can add a skill challenge by which the characters help to keep Bahamut alive. The Platinum Dragon should not die again, but failure can mean that Bahamut's waning life-force is channeled to Namissi to make him even more formidable in combat.

Namissi, Blue Exarch of Tiamat, Ancient Blue Dragon (N) **Level 32 Solo Artillery**
Gargantuan natural magical beast (dragon) XP 135,000
Initiative +23 **Senses** Perception +30; darkvision
Exarch's Presence (Fear) aura 5; enemies within the aura take a -2 penalty to attack rolls and saving throws
HP 1,184; **Bloodied** 592; see also *bloodied breath*
AC 46; **Fortitude** 46, **Reflex** 44, **Will** 43; if the heroes were successful in the "Corrupted Shrine" skill challenge in Encounter F1, the PCs have a +2 bonus on attacks in this encounter.
Immune lightning; **Resist** cold 20, fire 20
Saving Throws +5
Speed 10, fly 12 (hover), overland flight 15
Action Points 2

Gore (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Reach 4; +37 vs. AC; 2d8 + 12 damage plus 2d6 lightning damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares and knocked prone.

Claw (standard; at-will)
Reach 4; +37 vs. AC; 2d6 + 12 damage.

Draconic Fury (standard; at-will)
Namissi makes a *gore* attack and two *claw* attacks. If all three attacks hit, Namissi recharges *wingclap*.

Wingclap (move; encounter) ✦ **Thunder**
Namissi flies up to 12 squares and attacks with his wings at the end of his move: reach 4, two targets; +36 vs. Fortitude; 3d10 + 10 thunder damage. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Bloodied Breath (free, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Lightning**
Namissi's breath weapon recharges, and he uses it.

Breath Weapon (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Lightning**
Close burst 10; The dragon targets up to four creatures; the first target must be within 20 squares of the dragon, and each additional target must be within 10 squares of the previous target; +36 vs. Reflex; 4d12 + 22 lightning damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). *Miss:* Half damage, and the target is dazed until the end of its next turn.

Thunderclap (standard; at-will) ✦ **Thunder**
Close burst 3; +36 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 10 thunder damage, and the target is stunned until the end of the blue dragon's next turn. *Critical Hit:* As above, except that the target is stunned (save ends).

Tiamat's Wrath (when Namissi drops to 0 hit points) ✦ **Lightning**
Close burst 5; +36 vs. Reflex; 5d6 + 10 lightning damage. *Miss:* Half damage.

Exarch's Shield (immediate reaction, when hit by a ranged or area attack; encounter) ✦ **Lightning**
Area burst 4 within 20; must target the triggering attacker; +36 vs. Reflex; 4d6 lightning damage, and ongoing 10 lightning damage (save ends). *Miss:* Half damage.

Faith of Tiamat (minor; usable only while bloodied; at-will)
Namissi's next successful attack that deals lightning damage instead deals acid, cold, fire, or poison damage (his choice).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Athletics +32, Insight +30, Intimidate +25
Str 35 (+28) **Dex** 25 (+23) **Wis** 29 (+25)
Con 32 (+27) **Int** 31 (+26) **Cha** 18 (+20)

As the heroes make their way from the Eternal Flame Pavilion to the Charcoal Palace, read:

Dragons and efreets darken the skies above the city, but Bahamut's forces are on the defensive now. None of the slaves or city guards scattered across the Furnace show any inclination toward approaching Namissi atop the ruins of the palace, but smoke and chaos provide cover for your approach.

The characters must ascend to the top of the ruined palace in order to see the wounded Bahamut, unconscious within a massive fall of rubble.

As Tiamat's exarch, Namissi knows the adventurers by reputation and has no intention of allowing them to thwart his victory. He attacks when the first hero reaches the upper levels of the palace as shown on the tactical map.

With the city's magical wards shut down and Tiamat's efreets and dragons locked in combat with Bahamut's forces, the characters are free to use teleportation or flying to ascend to the top of the palace.

Tactics

Namissi is an unrelenting opponent, blessed with the foul power of Tiamat. He stays in motion as he alternates *breath weapon* with *wingclap* and *draconic fury* attacks against single targets. He reserves his *thunderclap* and *exarch's shield* until he can target three or more adventurers, combining *faith of Tiamat* with *breath weapon* attacks against characters demonstrating a resistance to lightning.

Development

The power that Namissi channels from Tiamat is shattered when the blue exarch dies.

Even as Namissi falls, a keening wail rises across the City of Brass. The dragons of Tiamat's army appear to be in sudden disarray. Bahamut's scattered forces are regrouping as the Dragon Queen's servants break ranks and scatter.

Whatever power the blue exarch held over the City of Brass, it has been broken with his death.

More importantly, the efreets of the city have also sensed the blue exarch's fall. Like a ripple spreading out from the Charcoal Palace, the elite guards of the City of Brass are taking to the air, working with Bahamut's dragons to crush Tiamat's faltering resistance.

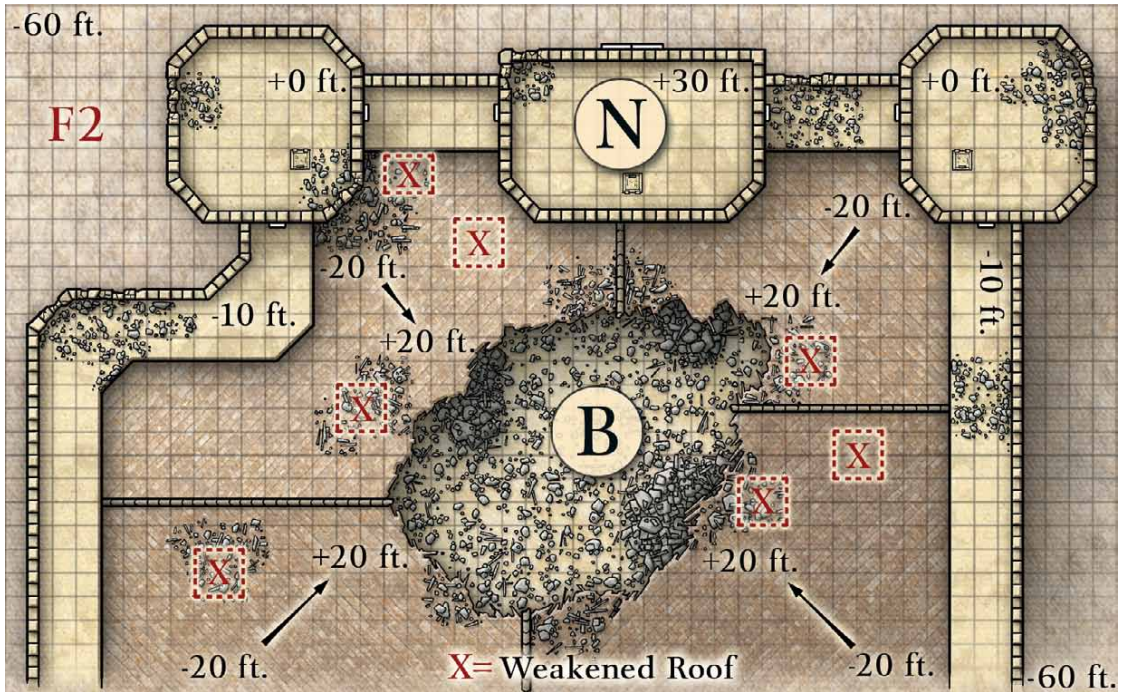
Return to page 28 for the conclusion of the adventure.

Features of the Area

Illumination: The City of Brass is brightly lit day and night.

Rubble: These areas of loose scree are difficult terrain. A creature that runs, charges, or makes a double move through rubble must make a DC 20 Acrobatics check or fall prone.

Large or smaller creatures moving through areas of rubble on the sloping roof (see below) are slowed.



Rubble Pile: Fallen rock and debris are piled to a height of 20 feet. A rubble pile must be climbed with a DC 15 Athletics check.

Sloping Roof: The roof of this section of the Charcoal Palace inside the parapets and the curtain wall slopes steeply up toward the center and the area of collapse. These areas are difficult terrain.

Weakened Roof: The shattered roof has been weakened in the areas indicated on the tactical map. A creature that walks on one of these areas triggers a collapse, and must make a DC 33 Acrobatics check or plunge down in a fall of rubble. A creature that falls is buried. A buried creature can clamber out of the area of collapse with two DC 33 Athletics checks. Up to three characters adjacent to the collapse on the roof can assist this check.

Namissi is too large to fall if an area of weakened roof collapses beneath him. If the blue exarch triggers a collapse, he is slowed until the start of his next turn.

Collapse: The roof of this section of the Charcoal Palace has been shattered and collapsed where Namissi and Bahamut fought. The Platinum Dragon lies wounded and half-buried within the rubble. The bottom of the collapse is 50 feet below the peak of the shattered roof. A creature that cannot fly or teleport down into the rubble must climb down with a DC 28 Athletics check.

About the Author

Scott Fitzgerald Gray (9th-level layabout, vindictive neutral) started gaming in high school and has worked as a writer and editor much of the time since then. After belatedly realizing he could combine both vocations in 2004, he's been making up for lost time as a freelance RPG editor and designer, primarily for Wizards of the Coast. He lives in the Canadian hinterland with a schoolteacher, two daughters, and a large number of animal companions.

Domains of Dread: The Endless Road

By Ari Marmell
illustration by Wayne England

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PARAGON
11-20

"Love and Fear—harsh taskmasters both. We dance to their whips on our backs, gallop at their goading. Insipid epics and silly priests would set them at odds, one against the other, but no! They are compatriots, secret conspirators, driving us, their beasts of burden, to darkest deeds.

"And it is these—neither Antipathy nor Ambition, neither Gluttony nor Greed, but Devotion and Dread—whose fetid rutting births the greatest evils in hearts both putrid and pure.

"Witness the gentle Talitha van Hassen, and the filial loyalty and childish fears that led her into loathsome betrayal and murderous lies..."

—from the opening chorus of By Innocence Undone, a lesser-known work of the tiefling playwright Semrael Engvar.

Like tendrils of the malevolent mists that surround them, some of the Shadowfell's domains of dread reach from the darkness to brush against the flesh of the mortal world—and, sometimes, to drag the inhabitants of that world back with them.

When clouds gather and the moon squints like the eye of an old leper, the great length of twisted highway called the Endless Road stretches itself across the face of the world just long enough to take travelers unaware into its grasp. There they wander, perhaps forever, along a road without beginning or end. They might find themselves torn apart by the claws of the hungry dead or the maddened living, enslaved to the man whose vile deeds spawned the Road itself...or cut down by the headless horror that terrorizes them all.

The Endless Road is a domain of dread designed for characters of low-paragon (or, if they're skilled, high heroic) tier. It might keep them only briefly—or it might never let them go, forcing them to unravel its secrets, and perhaps sacrifice others to save themselves.

The Road Thus Far

The tiny hamlet of Tranquility attracted absolutely nobody's attention. The nearby road produced only sporadic travel, and while Tranquility boasted an inn to provide travelers with shelter, it's doubtful that any would recall the town's name.

The villagers farmed, shepherded, gardened, and crafted under the watchful eyes of the van Hassen family. They'd never been elected or appointed, held no titles like "reeve" or "baron." No, the van Hassen line governed Tranquility because they owned more land (including the inn) and more coin than anyone else.

The latest van Hassen patriarch was a middle-aged man named Eli. His wife had died some years before, and he divided his time between his duties and his only child, his daughter Talitha. To Tranquility, Eli van Hassen seemed as respectable a landlord as the citizens could expect—if perhaps not as genial as his parents were.

Yet inwardly, Eli seethed, for Tranquility had no room for his ambitions. Standing as first citizen of a tiny hamlet wasn't enough; Eli wanted titles with *meaning*. He wanted to govern a community boasting more than a few hundred souls. From his estate, he watched the people scurry about, and he scorned them. He watched as suitors vied for his daughter's attentions, and he loathed them for trying to chip away at what authority he held, to steal the one person about whom he truly cared.

Still, Eli maintained his veneer of respectability, resigning himself to his lot. And perhaps, had the world continued to ignore Tranquility, he would have remained an unhappy man, but a blameless one. The villagers were woefully unprepared the day a monstrous hydra emerged from the surrounding forest. Something had driven it from its native fen, for its body was scarred, and one of its four heads missing. Though weakened, it was still far too terrible for the villagers to handle. They lost sheep, horses, and neighbors to its depredations. Tranquility needed a miracle—and, thanks to a small band of courageous citizens who traveled to seek help, it received one.

He rode into town like a conquering king, saber at his side, rich cloak falling across his back. He sat atop a dark steed, leading a small procession of soldiers. He appeared to have stepped from a fairy tale, and so far as the villagers were concerned he had, for he'd come to slay their monster.

Nobody today knows his name. In every tale of Tranquility, he is called only the Horseman.

Celebrating his arrival, the villagers put him up in the inn, plied him with food and drink, listened intently as he played a silver-stringed lute and sang the ballads that had inspired him to take up adventuring.

Talitha was smitten as only a teenager can be. She sat rapt, fascinated at the Horseman's every word, every move. The Horseman, in turn, was a perfect gentleman, yet he too felt a thrill of attraction that might grow into something more.

And Eli watched his people fawn over this newcomer, watched his daughter grow besotted, and his heart burned with a hatred that might have immolated the hydra itself.

For weeks the Horseman remained in Tranquility while his soldiers tracked down the hydra's lair. If he took advantage of the delay to spend ever more time with Talitha, then it must be said that not once did he step beyond the bounds of propriety.

Finally, his men found the beast's nest. With great fanfare, the Horseman and his entourage set out to rid Tranquility of their tormenter. For two days, the villagers waited, fretting and worrying, hopeful and afraid.

Tranquility erupted in jubilation when the Horseman and most of his men returned. And though they were bloodied and bruised, the three reptilian heads they carried left no doubt that they were victorious.

For weeks more the Horseman stayed, getting to know the people, walking with Talitha through fields and gardens. Slowly his men returned to their homes, but the Horseman remained.

Eli van Hassen could take it no longer, yet neither could he simply order the Horseman banished or slain. He would have to turn the people against their savior, and that he could not undertake alone.

Talitha wept and argued, yet in the end, she acquiesced. It never crossed her mind to disobey, for she feared the loss of her own status within Tranquility—and in agreeing to her father's demands, she sealed not merely the Horseman's fate, but her own as well.

The following day, as he walked with Talitha through one of the van Hassen farms, the Horseman was set upon by a dozen of Eli's guards. The Horseman swept up a rusty sickle that lay beside the barn and fought, slaying several before they overwhelmed him by weight of numbers.

Before the gathered villagers, growing ever more puzzled, ever angrier, the guards dragged the battered Horseman to a block of wood. There, at her father's behest, Talitha told the people horrid lies, claiming the Horseman had taken terrible advantage, ravished her by force during their walks.

Eli waited until the crowd was utterly enraged before he waved his guards forward. Even as he screamed his innocence and begged Talitha to recant, the Horseman was forced down upon the wooden block. One guard raised a heavy axe, and the head of Tranquility's beloved hero tumbled across the grass.

The corpse was unceremoniously dumped in a shallow grave beside the river, and as the villagers returned to daily life, bitterly bemoaning their "betrayal," that should have been the end of it. One week passed. Through a ceiling of clouds, the crescent moon gleamed a sickly blue. The folk of Tranquility retired early that evening, for the air smelled of a coming storm.

Yet what swept over them that night was not rain and lightning, but fog. The mists crept furtively through Tranquility, filling the streets, sending prodding fingers through doors and windows. The world ceased to be, buried under featureless gray.

A sudden, unending thunder deep within the fog resolved itself into the beating of a thousand hooves. Through the streets and fields of Tranquility they pounded, deafening in their fury, yet the villagers could see nothing moving in the mist.

When they emerged the following dawn, the villagers found their crops and gardens trampled under uncountable hoof-prints. The gates of the van Hassen estate hung from broken hinges, and the manor lay desolate, covered in the dust of decades. Eli and Talitha were never seen again. Neither was the estate staff, save a few who'd been elsewhere that night.

And the grave of the Horseman gaped open, a wound in the banks of the river.

LORE

A character knows an incomplete version of the previous history—perhaps believing the Horseman was guilty—with a DC 18 History check. With a DC 23 History check, she knows the correct version of the tale.

With a DC 18 History or Arcana check, she's heard rumors of a mysterious phenomenon wherein mists cover an otherwise normal highway, stealing away travelers between one step and the next.

Otherwise, *no* Lore is provided for the Endless Road or its inhabitants, for there is no way for the characters to have heard it. Only by speaking to inhabitants of the domain, or consulting magical sources, might they learn more of the Endless Road.

A Forgotten Thoroughfare

Tranquility survives today, though it's never been quite the same. The villagers abandoned the area around the van Hassen estate. The property stands abandoned, some few hundred yards from occupied buildings. The villagers dislike speaking of those events, and travelers who press the issue, or express any intent to explore the estate, receive cold stares and icy requests to continue on their way.

Tranquility itself has little to offer. A number of farmsteads might provide a loft or a barn in which to sleep, shops might provide a modicum of supplies, and the village temple—containing rude shrines to Erathis, Melora, Moradin, and Sehanine—might serve as a place to pray. The grave of the Horseman is long gone, filled in and planted over.

Assuming the characters ignore the villagers' wishes, however, the abandoned estate could prove a source of adventure. Such tragedy could well attract undead spirits, malicious fey, or students of necromancy.

In addition to the locations listed below, the estate has a number of outbuildings—primarily servants' quarters, groundskeepers' cottages, guest houses, and storage sheds—all falling into decay.

1. The Inn: This dilapidated building stands three stories tall. The shutters hang open, and the rooms are rank with mildew and rot. Floorboards and furniture have decayed in the rain, and several doors have been removed. Still, a few rooms are tolerable, if the characters are desperate for a place to sleep—and assuming nothing horrible now occupies the inn. The foodstuffs in the kitchen have rotted away, but a few barrels of ale and bottles of spirits have survived the years.

2. The Broken Gate: The fence surrounding the estate has definitely seen better days. Entire planks are missing, while others are so broken or loose that they might as well be absent. The wrought iron gate stands open, one hanging loose from broken hinges and the other lying flat upon the earth. The scent of rust is overwhelming. The gateposts are topped with divine symbols: Erathis on the left, Melora on the right.

3. The Manor: It stands like an icon of another age, out of place amid the humble structures of Tranquility. The manor's walls are stone, its entryway flanked by great columns, its windows boasting actual glass. The years have not been kind, however, for much of that glass is broken, the walls cracked and overrun with ivy. Inside, the dust lies far thicker than even decades of emptiness can account for. Cobwebs hang from the corners, the carpets are thick with mildew, and the furniture is decaying into a soggy mass. The greatest damage afflicts the portraits and tapestries: Every face is obscured beneath heavy layers of mold.

Behind the manor, a small rose garden is choked with brambles and weeds. A single rosebush yet thrives, its petals a rich, bloody crimson. Should the characters dig beneath it, they find a human skull buried below. The severed spine suggests that this may be the head of the Horseman himself.

4. The Stables: This rickety wooden structure held up surprisingly well, showing far less of the decay seen elsewhere. Inside, dried straw crunches underfoot, hiding scattered equine bones. In one stall, what was once a fine leather saddle with silver buckles lies cracked and tarnished, but no bones lie beneath it.

GETTING THE CHARACTERS THERE

Unlike some other domains, the Endless Road needn't wait for the characters; it can appear in the mortal realm, "overlapping" an existing path or highway. Thick mists rise, the moon gleams sickly through the clouds, and travelers hear the thunder of distant hooves. Often, a traveler's first hint that he's not where he was is the lightning-swift strike of the Headless Horseman, but even should the characters survive this attack—or if the Horseman doesn't appear—when the mist lifts, they find themselves on a new and unfamiliar road.

Still, the boundaries between the Endless Road and the mortal realm are weakest around the van Hassen estate. If you'd prefer to guide the characters there, here are a few adventure hooks.

The Story Beckons: The van Hassen story has spread. Several surviving members of the estate staff later admitted the truth of what occurred, but many villagers refused to believe them, perhaps because they could not accept culpability for allowing the Horseman's execution. Thus, many versions of the tale exist, some accurately detailing Eli's and Talitha's betrayal, others casting the Horseman as the villain. Regardless of which version they hear, the characters might be tempted to locate Tranquility and investigate what occurred—in part because many versions claim that the van Hassen wealth remains undiscovered.

The Haunted Manor: The tragedy that occurred here could attract all manner of spiritual horrors. While the villagers are reluctant to seek outside help after what happened, they might be forced to do so if the haunting spreads beyond the estate.

The Beast of the Swamp: Attacks on other roads or communities inspire the characters to set out into a nearby swamp and confront the beast that long ago drove the fen hydra into the woods around Tranquility. The characters might find themselves here as they look for a place to stay, or as they track tales of the beast's earlier rampages.

THE ENDLESS ROAD

Eli van Hassen knew something was very wrong. The estate was subtly altered: Buildings didn't stand where they should, and the grasses and gardens were wilted. The property's fence was of wood no longer, but wrought iron, and as he wandered that border, he saw no sign of Tranquility, but a wide highway that wound to the horizon, and a thick forest beyond.

Eli set out with a contingent of guards, hoping to explore this mysterious road. Yet he'd traveled barely a few dozen yards before the clouds and the mist plunged the world into darkness. The light gleaming sickly through the clouds was the faint glow of the crescent moon, not the noonday sun.

The thunder of hooves was his only warning before the Horseman fell upon them. Eli outran death, escaping back to the sanctuary of his estate, but he left behind him the headless corpses of a dozen men. Even though he never learned where he was, he understood his situation well enough: To leave the estate was to court death at the hands of the man he had murdered.

The true dark lord of the Endless Road is Eli van Hassen, but his power is limited as compared to the lords of most other domains of dread. His power extends only to the borders of his estate; if he leaves the grounds, he becomes as powerless as any other traveler.

Talitha shares some of her father's curse, though none of his power. And the Horseman, though technically not the domain's dark lord, is a manifestation of the Endless Road itself, and seems more powerful than the dark lord. Thus many who have heard of the Endless Road make the mistake of thinking that the Horseman is the region's sovereign.

THE DOMAIN

The Endless Road seems literally to have no end. While some travelers find themselves eventually returned to paths in the real world, or other Shadowfell domains, most who trod the Endless Road never reach any destination at all. They may walk until all traces of inhabitation are lost behind them, and still find nothing but woods or hills to either side, and the highway stretching—always stretching—before them.

The locations presented herein represent only a portion of possible sites along the Endless Road. Feel free to add your own, spread these out, move them around, or otherwise modify and expand the domain. Further, if the characters manage to depart the Endless Road and then return, or if they're caught outside when the Mists rise, they might discover that locations have actually moved. So far as the natives are concerned, nothing has changed, but the characters may find that familiar locales are no longer in the same order, or that the distances between them have altered. A few might no longer exist, while new ones might have appeared.

The Road needn't be a single winding path; feel free to add major forks and intersections, forming a small network of byways, the largest of which have no apparent end.

Eli and Talitha van Hassen are cursed by their imprisonment in the Shadowfell. Their estate remains an exile they dare not leave, for they know the hideous death that awaits beyond.

For Eli, who knows that many communities lie along the road but was never content with his status in Tranquility, ruling a single property is utter torment.

Talitha, meanwhile, comes slowly to understand that in acquiescing to her father's hideous demands, she did *not* secure herself future social gains. Rather,

she has sacrificed all opportunities for a greater life, doomed to live forever in her father's shadow. Today she does little more than aimlessly roam the estate, or listlessly tend the lush rose garden and hedge maze, and dream of making a different choice.

As to whether the Horseman suffers, whether anything of the man who died remains in the headless murderer that haunts the twisting road, none can know.

The Van Hassens

Though many decades have passed since their arrival, the van Hassens and their staff have not aged; they believe only a few years have gone by, and no argument or evidence can convince them otherwise.

Eli van Hassen stands on the far end of middle age, his hair gray and his face heavily lined. He prefers fine clothes of rich colors, and his movements appear sudden or exaggerated, as though he were possessed by a constant angry frustration. The domain has granted Eli some measure of power over the land—accidents befall those who oppose him, the ground reaches up to impede his attackers, and so forth. Yet even this is more frustration than blessing, for while Eli revels in this power, he cannot consciously control it, nor exercise that power over any who dwell beyond his estate.

His daughter, Talitha, appears a young woman of around 18 or 19. Her dark hair hangs long down her back, and her features are willowy, almost fey. Formerly fond of bright colors, Talitha now wears dark blouses and skirts, as though in mourning. Unlike her father, Talitha has no special power over the lands of the estate—yet another cruel jest of fate ... or some other, darker power that holds them imprisoned. As such, Talitha's statistics are not presented here; if necessary she can be treated as a normal human lackey (*Monster Manual* 162).

Eli van Hassen Tactics

Eli remains distant, putting guards and other allies between himself and his foes. Eli's "powers" are not truly his own, but represent the land reacting to protect him (although, for all *mechanical* purposes, they are his powers and expend his actions). As such, they take different forms. *Fickle fortune* might manifest as debris falling from the ceiling, a stray arrow from earlier in the battle, the ground reaching out with roots to twist the ankles of the foe, or the sudden appearance of a swarm of insects tearing at someone's flesh. Make use of these powers as best befits the situation, but remember that Eli himself is never entirely certain what will happen.

Eli van Hassen **Level 11 Controller**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 600

Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +7
HP 112; **Bloodied** 56
AC 25; **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 24; see also *cringe and cower*
Speed 6

⊕ **Dagger** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+16 vs. AC; 3d4 + 4 damage.

⊗ **Fickle Fortune** (standard; at-will)
Close burst 5; targets one creature in burst; +15 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 4 damage, and one of the following effects (roll 1d6).
1-3: knocked prone
4-5: slowed until the end of the target's next turn
6: dazed until the end of the target's next turn.

✲ **Foul Fortune** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅)
Area burst 2 within 10; +15 vs. Fortitude; 3d8 + 5 damage, and the target is knocked prone and takes one of the following effects (roll 1d6) (save ends).
1-3: slowed
4: restrained
5: dazed
6: -2 penalty to all attack rolls and skill checks.

Cringe and Cower
Van Hassen gains a +2 bonus to all defenses when he's within 5 squares of at least two allies.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Bluff +16, Diplomacy +16, Insight +12, Religion +14
Str 9 (+4) **Dex** 12 (+6) **Wis** 15 (+7)
Con 16 (+8) **Int** 18 (+9) **Cha** 22 (+11)
Equipment dagger

The Headless Horseman

The Horseman and his entourage are forces of nature of the Endless Road. They appear almost anywhere, at any time, and seem to have no motivation other than slaughter.

The Horseman can sense either van Hassen leaving the estate, or if the estate's protections are broken, and appears instantly to seek his revenge. Otherwise, he appears seemingly at random. Sometimes he attacks instantly; at other times he harries foes for hours, letting them escape so that he might ride them down once more. He most frequently appears where the road is wide, or where numerous paths converge, allowing him a wide field of battle. (The road seems to accommodate him in this. Create tactical maps where the road is unnecessarily wide, or where terrain makes leaving the road difficult.)

In addition to being limited to the road's vicinity (see *bound to the road*), the Horseman cannot cross water wider than he or his mount can jump. Further, he can be held at bay by holy barriers, such as the symbol-bedecked gate of the van Hassen estate, if those barriers are maintained by powerful, or numerous, individuals of true faith.

The Horseman's arrival is heralded by a sudden clouding of the sky and a rising mist, until little of the world beyond the road is visible. Day or night, the light that shines through the clouds takes on the sickle-shaped blue of the crescent moon.

The Horseman appears amid thundering hooves, a headless apparition in black leather with silver embellishments, blood-red cloak fanned out behind. He stands in a saddle of blackest leather, and holds aloft a blood-stained sickle.

In life, the Horseman rode an aging warhorse he jokingly called Spitfire because she was "an old nag." Spitfire has become a hideous beast, an enormous black charger of impossible ferocity. Flame erupts beneath her iron-shod hooves, blood drips where the reigns saw into the corners of her mouth, and her teeth come to carnivorous points.

Behind them, a crowd seems to move through the fog, heralded by hideous laughter and gibbering babble. What follows is a collection of the Horseman's prior victims, an array of heads that bounce and roll as though having just fallen from the headsman's block. Most snap and bite, clinging to a foe, but a few bear the malevolent power of the domain, spitting vile curses in shrieking voices.

The Horseman's Tactics

The Horseman normally remains mounted throughout combat, making frequent *executioner's step* charge attacks. He uses *beheading slash* as soon as the opportunity arises, while Spitfire uses *run to ground* to keep victims from escaping. They come in fast, moving to attack before foes can leave the road.

The gibbering head swarm attempts to overrun one or more foes, while the cursing heads maneuver to catch the largest number of foes in their curses.

Gibbering Heads **Level 15 Soldier**
Large shadow magical beast (swarm, undead) XP 1,200
Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +11; darkvision
Teeth and Tongues aura 1; any enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes 7 damage.
HP 148; **Bloodied** 74
AC 31; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 26
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** half damage from melee and ranged attacks; 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 close and area attacks, 10 radiant
Speed 8, fly 4 (altitude limit 3)
⨁ **Chomping Maws** (standard; at-will)
+20 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 6 damage and the target is grabbed. The target takes 5 damage at the end of its turn as long as it is grabbed by the gibbering heads swarm. The swarm can continue to make additional attacks—against the same target or others—while maintaining grabs, and can sustain all grabs with a single minor action.
Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Str 14 (+9) **Dex** 23 (+13) **Wis** 19 (+11)
Con 20 (+12) **Int** 7 (+5) **Cha** 14 (+9)

Cursing Heads **Level 15 Controller**
Large shadow magical beast (swarm, undead) XP 1,200
Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +11; darkvision
Teeth and Tongues aura 1; any enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes 7 damage.
HP 148; **Bloodied** 74
AC 29; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 28
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** half damage from melee and ranged attacks; 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 close and area attacks, 10 radiant
Speed 8, fly 4 (altitude limit 3)
⨁ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
+19 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 5 damage.
Curse of Stone (standard; encounter)
Close blast 5; deaf creatures are immune; +19 vs. Will; the target is slowed (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target is immobilized instead of slowed (save ends). *Second Failed Saving Throw:* The target is petrified (no save).
Curse of Plague (standard; encounter) ✦ **Poison**
+19 vs. Fortitude; 3d10 + 6 poison damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).
Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Str 14 (+9) **Dex** 20 (+12) **Wis** 19 (+11)
Con 20 (+12) **Int** 12 (+8) **Cha** 23 (+13)

Spitfire **Level 15 Skirmisher**
Large shadow magical beast (mount) XP 1,200
Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
HP 155; **Bloodied** 77
AC 29 (31 against opportunity attacks); **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 26
Saving Throws +2 against immobilizing, restraining, and slowing effects
Speed 12 (14 when charging); phasing
⨁ **Iron-Shod Hooves** (standard; at-will)
+20 vs. AC; 1d10 + 6 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).
Phantom Rider (while mounted by a friendly rider of 15th level or higher; at-will) ✦ **Mount**
The rider gains phasing. The mount and raider share all resistances and immunities, and may act together on the higher of the pair's initiative.
Run to Ground (standard; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞)
Spitfire moves up to her speed. Each square she leaves becomes difficult terrain until the end of her next turn. Any enemy that hits Spitfire with a melee attack during this move is immobilized until the end of Spitfire's next turn.
Unholy Resilience (immediate reaction when Spitfire is subject to an immobilizing, restraining, or slowing effect that a save can end; encounter)
Spitfire makes a saving throw against the triggering effect, even if it does not normally allow a save to end.
Bound to the Road
Spitfire is linked to the road. She treats all terrain beyond the road as difficult terrain, and she cannot move beyond line of sight of the road.
Alignment Evil **Languages** –
Skills Endurance +20
Str 24 (+14) **Dex** 20 (+12) **Wis** 13 (+8)
Con 27 (+15) **Int** 6 (+5) **Cha** 16 (+10)

The Headless Horseman	Level 15 Elite Brute
Medium shadow humanoid (blind, undead)	XP 2,400

Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +16; blindsight 10
HP 362; **Bloodied** 181
AC 27; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 26
Immune disease, fear, poison; **Resist** 20 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant
Saving Throws +2 (+4 against immobilizing, restraining, and slowing effects)
Speed 6
Action Points 1

Sickle (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Targets one or two creatures; +16 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 7 damage (crit 4d8+7 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the Horseman's next turn). This attack rolls a critical hit on an 18-20.

Beheading Slash (standard; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**
Targets a bloodied creature; +16 vs. Reflex; the target is reduced to 0 hit points. *Miss:* 2d8 + 23 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the Horseman's next turn.

Unholy Resilience (immediate reaction when the Horseman is subject to an immobilizing, restraining, or slowing effect; encounter)
The Horseman makes a saving throw against the triggering effect, even if it does not normally allow a save to end.

Executioner's Step
When the Horseman makes a charge attack (whether on foot or mounted), he gains combat advantage against the target of the charge.

Combat Advantage
The horseman deals ongoing 10 damage (save ends) on a hit against any creature granting him combat advantage.

Bound to the Road
The Horseman is linked to the road. He treats all terrain beyond the road as difficult terrain, and he cannot move beyond line of sight of the road.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Understands all spoken languages; does not speak
Skills Athletics +19

Str 24 (+14)	**Dex** 20 (+12)	**Wis** 19 (+11)
Con 21 (+12)	**Int** 9 (+6)	**Cha** 14 (+9)

Equipment leather armor with steel breastplate, sickle

The Van Hassen Estates

The van Hassen estate covers several hundred acres, consisting primarily of gently rolling fields and groves of trees. It boasts dozens of minor structures not detailed below, including guest cottages, servants' and caretakers' quarters, storage buildings, a few barns, and a variety of stables. Intruders wandering the grounds—and, on rarer occasion, invited guests—might find themselves facing not merely estate guards, but the wrathful ghosts and wraiths of those who died in Eli's service, or even Eli's herd of horses, who turn monstrous and carnivorous on random nights (use stats for the celestial charger, *Monster Manual* 159, with a chaotic evil alignment).

1. The Sacred Gate: The estate is surrounded by a wrought-iron fence over twelve feet high. A single gate—also of iron, with marble posts—allows access to the grounds. The gate, and the entire fence, are interwoven with holy symbols (primarily of Erathis). The gates stand open during the day, but are locked and barred at night. They are manned by half a dozen estate guards, while additional guards patrol the grounds.

It is Eli's religious faith, and the mystical power he now wields, that prevents the Headless Horseman from entering the grounds. While Eli does not explain the specifics, he's not shy about proclaiming himself the source of everyone's protection, and that his death would leave them vulnerable to the Horseman's wrath.

2. Traveler's Rest: This building stands nearly a hundred feet across and four stories high. It can house scores of people, and the enormous kitchen can feed an army. It is here most "guests" of the estate reside (see "Life on the Endless Road," until they've earned sufficient trust to dwell closer to, or within, the main house. The inn is run by Carspen Rhenk (gnome bard 11), one of Eli's first servants in this strange realm. Carspen knows the various methods for ending or escaping the domain (see page 80). While he'll never tell the characters that they can escape by turning the van Hassens over to the Horseman, he might reveal other methods. In addition to Carspen, the characters can encounter just about any NPC of potency here, as "guests" who have chosen servitude over aimless wandering and possible beheading.

3. Van Hassen Manor: This house of stone walls and intricate columns contains over a hundred rooms throughout many wings and halls. The windows are heavy glass—some stained—and vibrant tapestries bedeck the walls. Guards and staff are everywhere, as are an array of constructs and golems that simply manifested from portions of the house to do Eli's will. It's remarkably easy to get lost—especially since the rooms occasionally move in response to Eli's unspoken desires.

4. The Rose Garden: An enormous rose garden thrives behind the manor, with graceful marble statues and fountains overlooking winding paths that eventually lead into a hedge maze several acres across. Talitha spends much time wandering these paths, wondering what might have been. All who die on the estate are buried here to nourish the roses, and rumor holds that the plants occasionally reach out to snare passersby, dragging them bodily into the soil to feed their roots.

Van Hassen Estate Guard Level 10 Minion Soldier
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 125

Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +6
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 26; **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 21
Speed 6

⊕ **Halberd** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +17 vs. AC; 8 damage.

⊕ **Crossbow** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 15/30; +16 vs. AC; 8 damage.

Combat Advantage
If the estate guard has combat advantage against a target, a hit also knocks the target prone.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common

Str 21 (+10)	**Dex** 18 (+9)	**Wis** 12 (+6)
Con 14 (+7)	**Int** 10 (+5)	**Cha** 9 (+4)

Equipment leather armor, halberd, crossbow, 10 bolts

Estate Guard Tactics

Van Hassen estate guards initiate combat with crossbow attacks, then move to flank individual foes. They are obsessively loyal to van Hassen and fight to the death.

Life on the Endless Road

Over the decades, hundreds of poor souls have become trapped along the length of the Endless Road. Most band together for company and safety, sharing a grim and joyless existence of desperation and despair. The domain's citizens live beneath the heel of those strong enough to enforce their obedience: Eli van Hassen or the landowners (and mob rule) of Havenshire and similar villages.

Though nearly the size of a hamlet itself, access to the van Hassen estate is limited to the aristocrats who dwell within. Eli has not given up on his ambitions, and if he cannot obtain power elsewhere, he must bring others here to serve him. He does this via the *Traveler's Rest*, a Shadowfell "echo" of the inn he owned in Tranquility. Eli knows that his estate is a refuge from the Horseman—and, thanks to his guards, from other hazards of the road as well. He has built his personal kingdom by allowing travelers to stay at *Traveler's Rest* for as long as they like—but only if they swear fealty, becoming Eli's servants. His estate staff and guards have swelled in number, for many who have despaired of ever leaving the Endless Road consider this indentured servitude a small price for a safe home. After so many years, the van Hassen estate has become not merely the safest of the Road's various communities, but the largest and wealthiest.

In the other communities, people jealously hoard what they have. Resources are scarce, for people fear to travel more than a few hours from their abodes lest they be trapped on the road by the Horseman or the domain's other hazards. Everyone, from outsiders to neighbors, is viewed with suspicion, and few dare risk

their own good to aid others. Almost nobody who's dwelt here for more than a few years believes that escape is possible, and anyone claiming that it is can expect to find themselves met by doubt, disdain, and even violence for daring to hope.

Havenshire

The oldest of the Endless Road's communities, and likely the largest, is Havenshire.

Havenshire occupies a modest area of farmable land between a sluggish expanse of river—which protects the town from the Horseman—and the edge of the Wailing Wood. The community has spread to cover the entirety of the available land; the streets are cramped and narrow, and buildings often have upper stories built outward, overhanging the alleys and casting claustrophobic shadows. Resources are running low, no room for expansion remains, and newcomers are seen as competitors for space and supplies. Thus, while Havenshire might seem the characters' best option for comfort and safety, the truth is that nobody wants them there. The people are afraid, hungry, and forlorn, and while a powerful party might frighten them into keeping their distance, they may find themselves facing a lynch mob of desperate villagers.

The only means of reaching the village, unless the characters want to ford the wide waters, is a roofed bridge of heavy wooden planks.

HAVENSHIRE

Havenshire is the size of a small town, though it lacks resources that normally delineate a town from a village.

Population: 3,400. The townsfolk are mostly human, with a smattering of other common, civilized humanoids.

Government: A council of landowners—including both original occupants and their heirs—led by Marandice Haverbrook (human), daughter of the town's founder.

Defense: Havenshire is protected by a citizen militia, accompanied by a few dozen professional soldiers and adventurers.

Inns: None. Citizens occupy all available land, and they don't *want* outsiders staying.

Taverns: The Wet Whistle, the Running Hart; both sometimes refuse to serve outsiders.

Major Guilds: None.

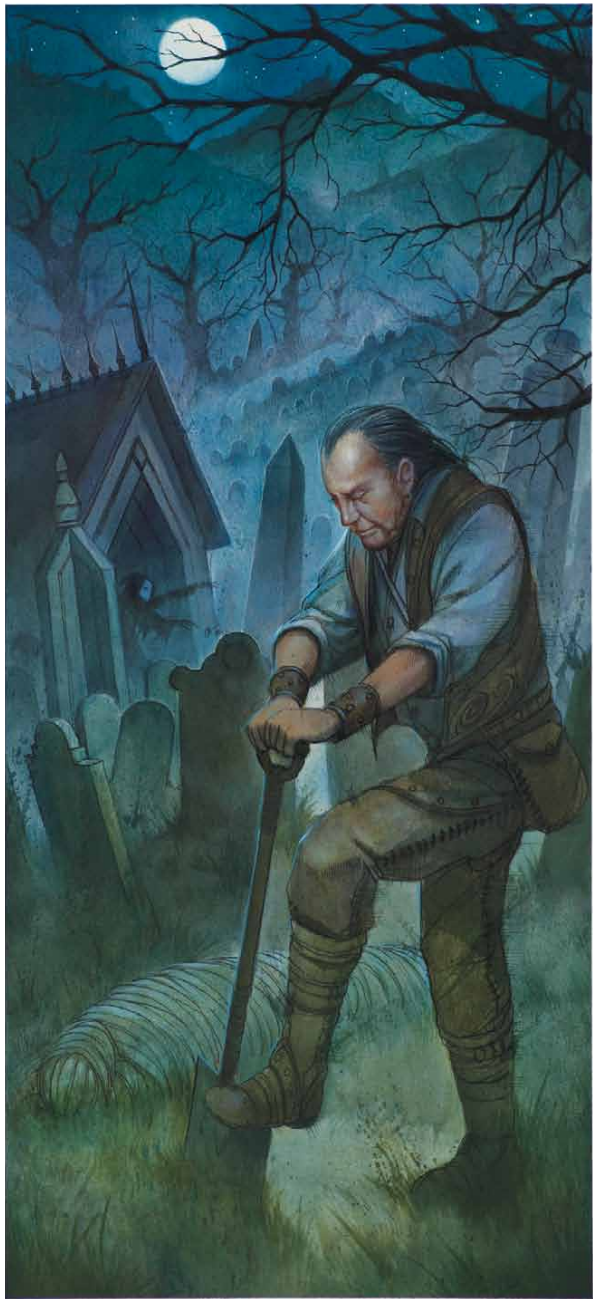
Supplies: Havenshire has few "shops" per se. The people shop and trade with individual craftsman within the population; most standard, non-magical trades—smithing, carpentry, pottery, what have you—can be found here.

Temples: Havenshire boasts one temple, with shrines to Avandra, Erathis, Moradin, Pelor, the Raven Queen, and Torog (the last in hopes of propitiating him and winning their freedom from the domain).

The Stone Orchard

Along an otherwise featureless expanse of the Endless Road stretches a vista of rolling hills. Scattered across them, as far as the eye can see, is a crowded array of gravestones, punctuated by crooked trees and the occasional aboveground mausoleum. This is the Stone Orchard, the cemetery of the Endless Road.

One old man, his flesh darkened and leathered by the sun, has maintained the Orchard since the graveyard first appeared. He spends his time wandering in a mule-drawn cart, collecting those who have died along the Endless Road, as well as the corpses from the various villages, most of whom lack sufficient room to bury their own. Perhaps because they appreciate his service, the Groundskeeper (his real name is unknown) travels undisturbed by either the Horseman or the cemetery's undead.



The Stone Orchard has a stronger connection to the Shadowfell proper than does the rest of the domain. Any who die within, and a small percentage of all corpses buried here, rise as citizens of the Village of the Dead, while the rest serve as food for the wights and ghouls. These undead wander the Road at night, attacking travelers and even infiltrating living communities, for the so-called White Reeve has designs on the entire domain.

The Rusted Gate: The Stone Orchard is surrounded by a fence of rusted iron posts and occasional wooden patches. The main gate resembles a pair of wings, and is carved with symbols of the Raven Queen. It hangs open at all times, allowing anyone to move in—or out. Other, smaller gates stand locked and chained throughout the property, but it requires little effort to get through them.

The Groundskeeper's Shack: Some dozens of yards from the main gate stands a rickety, three-room shack. This is the Groundskeeper's home, though he spends little time within. A primitive lean-to stands beside the shack, providing shelter for his mule and cart.

The Village of the Dead: Beneath the Stone Orchard sprawls an enormous warren, miles of twisting passageways and earthen-walled chambers. Access to the tunnels can be gained via several aboveground mausoleums or empty graves.

This "village," as the warren is called by its denizens, is inhabited by hundreds of undead. Ruled by the White Reeve, a pale creature with traits of both ghouls and wights, this necropolis boasts populations of horde ghouls, greater ghouls (*Dungeon* #156), wights, and skull lords who serve as the White Reeve's lieutenants.

The White Reeve rules from an underground palace, replete with audience chambers, sweeping balconies, and winding stairs—all somehow holding their shape despite being dug from the dirt and soil. The White Reeve and Tavnanda, his "court magician" (a lich), know all the secrets of the domain, including how to destroy the Horseman and the van Hassens, but the White Reeve doesn't wish to undertake such an effort until he knows he can usurp their power and keep the Endless Road—or at least the Village of the Dead—in existence.

The White Reeve **Level 13 Elite Soldier (Leader)**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead) XP 1,600
Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +9; darkvision
Shroud of the Grave aura 5; undead in the area lose vulnerable radiant.
HP 262; **Bloodied** 131
AC 29; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 25
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 15 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8, climb 4
Action Points 1
⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
+20 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends). If the target is a living creature that is already immobilized, stunned, or unconscious, the attack deals 1d8 extra damage.
⸸ **Ravenous Bite** (at-will; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃)
Targets an immobilized, stunned, or unconscious creature; +18 vs. AC; 2d6 + 6 damage, and the target loses a healing surge and is stunned until the end of the white reeve's next turn.
⸸ **Ravening Claws** (standard; at-will)
The White Reeve makes two claw attacks.
Morbid Inhabitation (free, only on the White Reeve's turn, 1/turn; at-will) ✦ **Teleportation**
The White Reeve swaps places with one undead creature within 10 squares.
Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Skills Insight +14, Stealth +17
Str 18 (+10) **Dex** 22 (+12) **Wis** 16 (+9)
Con 19 (+10) **Int** 14 (+8) **Cha** 19 (+10)

White Reeve Tactics

The White Reeve focuses on one or two targets, rendering them weak and hideously wounded before either finishing them off or leaving them for his allies while he moves on to fresher game. He normally uses *call of the grave* after several rounds, and uses *morbid inhabitation* not merely to avoid dangerous foes, but to appear next to tempting targets.

The Wailing Wood

The Wailing Wood occupies much of the wilderness beyond the road, the ominous canopy casting thick shadows over an even thicker carpet of brambles and underbrush. Narrow trails snake through the trees, providing paths not merely for wanderers, but for beasts of the wood—and even for the Horseman, who treats these paths as part of the road.

It is said that, no matter how far one travels into the Wailing Wood, or how carefully one maps the pathways, one eventually finds oneself back on the road, or else is lost forever in the darkened reaches. (But see "Escaping the Endless Road," page 80.)

Many of those lost in the wood have given up, lying down to sob in frustration until death releases them from their torment. From these bodies grow the weeping boles, trees with humanoid features whose tears nourish their own roots, and who reach out in their undying grief to grab at all who pass. The Wailing Wood is also home to dire beasts, lost spirits, predatory plants, and malicious fey who enjoy leading travelers into the grasps of the boles or other hazardous creatures.

Weeping Bole	**Level 13 Obstacle**
Hazard	800 XP

The knots on this tree's trunk weep copious tears even as the tree's jagged branches lash out to grasp at all who pass.

Hazard: This hazard appears to be a tree, occupying either a single square (Medium) or 4 squares (Large).

Perception

✦ DC 18: The character notices something peculiar about the tree—perhaps the face-like markings in the trunk or the clear tears it slowly weeps into the forest floor.

Additional Skill: Religion

✦ DC 23: The character recognizes the true nature of the bole before moving within 6 squares of it.

Trigger

When a creature enters or begins its turn in a square within 3 squares of the tree, it attacks.

Attack

Opportunity Action **Melee** 3
Target: The triggering creature
Attack: +18 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 6 damage, and the tree pulls the target 3 squares to an adjacent square and grabs the target. The tree automatically sustains the grab each turn. The target takes 5 damage each time it ends a turn while still grabbed.

Countermeasures

✦ A character can move through a threatened square without triggering the bole's attack by making a DC 23 Acrobatics or Stealth check.

✦ A character can attack the tree itself. Medium boles have AC and Reflex 5, Fortitude 10; hp 20. Large boles have AC and Reflex 4, Fortitude 12; hp 40. Both sizes have resist 10 to all damage types except fire and radiant.

Other Locations

The domain can include almost sort of feature you choose to add, but it certainly includes towns besides Havenshire (perhaps even an echo of Tranquility), abandoned camps and primitive buildings, roadside shrines, hazardous stretches of the rivers that appear and disappear from alongside the Road, and wilderness other than the Wailing Wood. (This last might include a murky fen where an undead remnant of Tranquility's hydra dwells.) Small encampments might be the home of bandits—called Toll-Takers—who wander the road, eyes ever alert for the Horseman, in search of travelers to rob and villagers to extort.

A few of these appear below, but this is hardly a comprehensive list.

The Abbey of Cherished Jocularity

The monks who dwell within this walled monastery are friendly, even jovial, offering passersby a night or two of safety, to pray in their great chapel or join the monks in the commissary. The monks, and their abbot, are constantly smiling, jesting, and laughing aloud.

The monks of Cherished Jocularity believe that it is their laughter and good spirits, not their religious faith, that keep the Horseman at bay. As such, they view any visitor who cannot maintain a constant façade of mirth and good cheer as a threat to their safety. A visitor who so much as frowns, or fails to laugh at the abbot's jesting, finds himself set upon as the monks attempt to murder him, laughing all the while.

The monks' homicidal madness has allowed the domain to distort them. While they appear normal to casual inspection, their bodies are twisted and distended beneath their robes. In all respects except size and reach, the monastery's leader—called the Laughing Abbot—has the stats of an oni mage (*Monster Manual* 201), while various monks are treated as either ogre savages or skirmishers (*Monster Manual* 199).

The Crossroads

Although the Endless Road includes many intersections, "the Crossroads" refers to one in specific. This junction connects several of the Road's largest branches, and legend states that fey powers gather here when the moon and stars are right, to tempt mortals into horrid bargains.

While locations along the Road might change from one visit to the domain to the next, the Crossroads *always* stands 149 miles from the Horseman's grave.

The Horseman's Grave

This patch of ground beside a gentle curve in the river is a near perfect echo of the Horseman's grave in the mortal realm. It's said that the Horseman often rises here after being slain, and that he appears to slaughter any who disturb the grave. Why this should be so, and what might be found in the grave itself, remains unknown.

The Whispering Well

This old stone well is falling into disrepair. Bricks are missing, the roof is full of holes, and a frayed rope barely supports a rusty bucket. *Something* dwells within the well's abnormal depths, and it occasionally whispers taunts or threats to passersby. Legend claims that many who dare linger here vanish entirely, but also that the thing dwelling within knows all the domain's secrets, including how to escape or to slay the dark lord.

Adventures on the Endless Road

The Endless Road is capable of appearing almost anywhere, at any time, making it far more flexible than most other Domains of Dread. This, combined with the fact that it contains multiple populations of trapped souls who have given up on escape, makes the Endless Road a perfect framework for an adventure—or even a series of adventures—in which the characters struggle desperately to find a means of freeing themselves, all while surviving the Domain's many hazards.

But a "survive and escape" plot is far from the only potential tale to be told within the confines of the Endless Road.

Tracking the Lost: The characters are looking for someone who vanished years before. Perhaps it was a friend or loved one of one of the heroes, a local champion or religious leader, or someone with knowledge the party can find nowhere else. Despite their greatest efforts, the characters cannot pinpoint a location, and even divination magic suggests that the person "can be found in no place, but only on the route between places." The characters must determine that this person has been trapped by the Endless Road—and then somehow find their way to this bizarre domain, track down the individual in one of the many grim communities, and find a means of returning their quarry to the world.

A Twisted Love: If the characters spend any time at all on the Endless Road, they might find themselves within the van Hassen estate—and once there, interacting with both Eli and Talitha. Despite her deep despair, Talitha is still a teenaged girl, and still drawn to powerful, heroic men who remind her of her lost love or who rekindle her ability to hope. Whether or not the chosen character returns her affections, Talitha does everything she can to aid him, and even risks following should the adventurers attempt to leave. Unfortunately—perhaps due to the influence of the Shadowfell, perhaps because of her own issues—Talitha has not learned from her past mistakes. When pressed by her father, her fear of being turned out and losing what position she has on the estate inspires her to betray the characters to Eli at the worst possible moment.

Lost Tranquility: A moment of planar bleed between the world and the Shadowfell has strengthened the spiritual ties between the Endless Road and the village of Tranquility. The entire region surrounding the community begins to slowly die: crops wither and animals grow ill. Only by finally ending the curse of Eli van Hassen and putting an end to the Endless Road, severing the region's ties to the Shadowfell, can local heroes hope to undo this growing blight.

What Cannot Die: If the domains of dread are intended as prisons, then perhaps the characters can make those prisons work for them. Upon discovering that they lack the means to defeat some enemy of theirs—perhaps a lich whose phylactery remains hidden, a fey horror vulnerable only to weapons they cannot locate, or a semi-divine creature that is truly immortal—the characters might set out to learn if there is any way to *deliberately* call the Endless Road to a particular spot in the mortal world, or at least to predict where it will next appear. If so, and if they can lure their foe to the right spot at the right time, perhaps they can cause this "unkillable" enemy to become imprisoned, if not forever, then at least long enough for them to discover some means to defeat it permanently.

Holes in the World: Perhaps the road itself is not the only overlap between this domain and the mortal realm. The underground warren of the White Reeve might open into catacombs and graveyards throughout the world, allowing that foul undead to establish a scattered kingdom from his throne deep within the Shadowfell.

The Road Between Worlds: Because the Endless Road can appear anywhere in the world—indeed, in almost *any* world—it's actually possible to use it *as* a road. If the characters (presumably after several harrowing adventures within the domain) manage to find a reliable means of escaping it, or even of influencing where it appears, it could become a viable means of travel to distant locales that they could not otherwise reach—*if* they can survive long enough to get there, of course.

Escaping the Endless Road

If Eli or Talitha are slain, they awaken the next morning in their beds, without memory or sign of their deaths. If the Horseman is killed, he reappears at the rising of the next moon. Thus, if slain before or during the new moon, up to three days might pass before he rises, but normally it takes only until the following night.

To truly slay any of the trio, the web of hate binding them must be sundered. The easiest way is to deliver the van Hassens up to the Horseman, for if they die at his hands, their deaths are permanent. If he slays both, the Horseman, and indeed the entirety of the Endless Road, ceases to exist at the rise of the next new moon, and all those trapped within find themselves returned to the mortal world. The characters might accomplish this by tricking or forcing the van Hassens off their estate, or by finding some means of allowing the Horseman to enter the grounds.

If they do so, however, they are not only committing deliberate murder, but they are also leaving all the other inhabitants of the estate vulnerable. Without Eli's protection, nothing stands between them and the Horseman's wrath.

Alternatively, the characters can try to convince the Horseman to confront the van Hassens not to kill them, but to forgive his betrayal at their hands. If they can do this, the Horseman and the domain fade instantly away, depositing everyone back on the mortal world (where Eli has no power).

Of course, the Headless Horseman seems to lack any personality save for a ceaseless, towering rage, barely showing signs of sentience let alone memory or mercy. Nor has he ever shown any indication of listening to what anyone has to say as he slaughters them. There's no telling how the characters might accomplish such a tremendous feat, but if it was easy, anyone could do it. (You might require them to first return the Horseman's head, if only so he has some means of communicating his forgiveness should the characters miraculously convince him to offer it.)

While these are the only means of *ending* the Endless Road, there are other means of escape. In some rare cases, the Endless Road randomly deposits travelers back into the mortal realm after weeks or months of wandering, often dozens to thousands of miles from where they started. (You can use this property to transport characters into foreign regions of the campaign world, using the domain as a conduit as much as a source of adventure.) However, the Road rarely releases travelers for long; anyone lucky enough to simply walk out is likely to be picked up by the Road again in the future.

Similarly, while most who wander the Wailing Wood or explore the twisting tunnels beneath the Stone Orchard find themselves back where they started, a rare few find pathways out of the domain. (This might occur at your whim, or as the result of a prolonged and difficult skill check.) Alas, these paths take them not back to their own world, but deposit them elsewhere in the Shadowfell, perhaps even another domain of dread.

However, the characters are not entirely reliant on luck; there is one deliberate way to escape, but it requires an almost superhuman effort. If the characters slay the Horseman within site of his grave, and then reach the Crossroads before he rises once more, they find themselves treading a similar junction somewhere in the mortal world. Of course, given the distances involved, this requires slaying the Horseman just before the new moon, and running themselves ragged on a three-day hellish race to the Crossroads.

About the Author

Ari Marmell was born in New York, moved to Houston when he was a year old, moved to Austin when he was 27, but has spent most of his life living in other worlds through a combination of writing and roleplaying games. He has been writing more or less constantly for the last dozen years, though he has only been paid for it the past five. He is the author of multiple roleplaying game supplements including work on Dungeons & Dragons®. Ari lives in Austin with his wife George and two cats.

Red Shoals of Dkar

by Bruce R. Cordell
illustrations by David Rapoza

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The Raiders of Dkar sail out of the storm, plunder the holds of ships and fishing villages up and down the coast, then disappear in a twinkling, leaving only fading wakes and dissipating squalls to mark their passage.

Well, that and looted treasuries, bodies of fallen defenders, and memories of terror.

Raiders of Dkar Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful History or Streetwise check.

DC 15: The Raiders of Dkar are marauders who appear under the cover of storms and other violent weather. They launch their attacks from a ship, and they are singularly adroit at losing any pursuers in the storm who give chase on the open water.

Folks recognize the Raiders of Dkar for the symbol most wear as tattoos or scars on their bodies: a lightning spiral.

DC 18: The raiders might strike a given region several times over the period of a month, then never show up again, or appear subsequently only after a few years have passed since their last visit.

DC 22: The raiders are rumored to be based in a location known as the Red Shoals of Dkar. However, on the rare occasion a raider is captured, they are far more likely to die than to describe in any way the location of their hidden lair.

Red Shoals of Dkar Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Arcana check.

DC 25: The Red Shoals of Dkar are a series of sandy islands that lie in the watery eye of a colossal chaos storm that perpetually rages through the Elemental Chaos. Most of the islands within the eye are impermanent things; they swell and shrink

according to random fluctuations of the surrounding storm. Though many of the shoals are inconstant, the elemental sea of water suffusing the eye seems a permanent fixture of the storm's hollow center.

DC 30: Some of the Red Shoals have been stabilized magically and serve as lairs to various groups of pirates, ne'er-do-wells, and other fearsome forces. These raiders have learned how to sail out of the eye at just the right time and in just the proper fashion so as to slip back into the world for a brief while—a period long enough to launch a raid and return before the tide turns and the passage closes.

DC 35: All the various raiders agree upon one law. Everyone who lives within the confines of the eye on a shoal who wishes to partake in raiding, either back into the world or out into the Elemental Chaos, must submit to bearing the mark of Dkar: a lightning spiral. Any raider who dares and survives Dkar's Maze, a cave system in the centermost isle among the shoals from which all the rest of the isles take their name, gains the lightning spiral mark.

Fury of Dkar

From the perspective of a native or traveler through the Elemental Chaos, the tempest surrounding Red Shoals is like any other storm of raw chaos sweeping across the Elemental Chaos, though larger than most. All such tempests pose a significant threat to natives and travelers alike (except for slaads, who are immune to the effects).

Chaos storms (*Manual of the Planes*, page 67) come and go. Normal chaos storms are normally limited to just over a dozen feet in radius. Some are much larger, and a few are so large and long lasting that they've acquired names. For instance, the Great Red Tempest's roiling, red blot reaches miles in all directions as it rolls across the Elemental Chaos, while the Fury of Dkar might be wider. Of the two, the Great Red Tempest is more well known (*The Plane Below: Secrets of the Elemental Chaos*, page 63), while the Fury of Dkar is an outlier because it doesn't often cross into view. For this reason, the Fury of Dkar's hollow eye makes a perfect lair for raiders.

Mechanics of Raiding

Raiders can sail their craft out of the protected eye and into the storm until they breach into the greater Elemental Chaos. However, if the storm is churning at the proper frequency (giving it a distinctive red cast) raiders can choose to call upon the magic resident in their spiral marks and sail into the world through an inconstant portal that lasts for several hours. Every raider with a mark is always aware of how long the portal will last and where it is, despite other creatures being completely blind to its existence. However, creatures of the world might stumble, even without a Mark of Dkar, back through an open storm portal and find themselves in Red Shoals.

The focus of the portal created between the world and the Elemental Chaos shifts each time it manifests to a new location in the world. Most assume the focus changes randomly or according to a cycle too complicated to model.

Abmelech is known for trade, information, and travelers from the Elemental Chaos and accidental visitors from the storm portal.

Abmelech Island

One of the largest permanent islands inside the storm's eye is Abmelech. Abmelech Island hosts a busy port town, "Abmelech City," thick with caravanserai. These trade centers serve the privateer vessels and send trade out to larger metropolises found in the Elemental Chaos; most notably, the City of Brass, though trade between the other islands in the Red Shoals is also brisk. A hard-bitten and no-nonsense merchant djinn named Corinth heads the place.

Abmelech is known for trade, information, and travelers from the Elemental Chaos and accidental visitors from the storm portal. More than a few visitors from the world wind up being sold to Farkus Island as slaves.

Three raider ships capable of crossing into the world put in at Abmelech: *Chaos Raven* (captained by a human woman named Erenia), *Mist of Shadows* (captained by a male shadar-kai named Mur Kar), and *Velvet Song* (captained by a half-elf male named Blackleaf). Each is crewed by a mix of humanoids and humanoidlike creatures, all of which bear the spiral lightning mark of Dkar.

Captain Erenia: Whenever the storm walls surrounding the shoals turn red, *Chaos Raven* puts to sea. Captain Erenia's black hair streams unbound in the wind, as do her salty curses. No fouler mouth exists in Red Shoals, though few are brave enough to point this out to her. Erenia lives to raid, and she never fails to return with a bounty of looted cargo and wares, though she stops short of capturing live victims for later sale to Farkus Island. In fact, on more than one

occasion *Chaos Raven* and the ship *Slight Bastard* sailing out of Farkus Island have come into conflict. Most believe it is only a matter of time before one craft sinks the other.

Though never substantiated, some mutter that Erenia operates a secret slave salvation route and ferries freed slaves back into the world.

Captain Mur Kar: The captain of *Mist of Shadows* is interested primarily in alchemical substance and drug trade. The shadar-kai captain has a keen nose for ferreting out drug shipments and uses the apparently random portals into the world with amazing success when it comes to disrupting (and commandeering) such trade. Mur Kar doesn't particularly care if a particular substance is banned; he cares only what kind of price he can command when he returns to trade the contents of his hold in the bazaars of Abmelech and Ellasar.

Mur Kar double-crossed the Circle (a mercenary band led by the eladrin Scarvarial of Ellasar Island) a few years back to secure a cargo of "traveler's dust" from destruction. Since then, the Circle and *Mist of Shadows* have waged a secret and often cold war. The Circle has promised to sink *Mist of Shadows*, and for its part, Mur Kar has promised to assassinate Scarvarial.

Captain Mur Kar, Shadar-Kai **Level 14 Controller**
Medium shadow humanoid XP 1,000
Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +13; low-light vision
HP 138; **Bloodied** 69
AC 27; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 28
Speed 7

Stormblade (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning, Thunder**
+19 vs. AC; 1d10 + 6 lightning and thunder damage, and the target falls prone.

Stormbolt (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Ranged 5; +18 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 6 lightning damage, and the target falls prone.

Overboard (standard; at-will) ✦ **Charm**
Ranged 5; targets a prone creature; +18 vs. Reflex; slide the target 5 squares.

Thunderburst (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Thunder**
Close burst 3; targets enemies; +16 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 6 thunder damage, and slide the target 5 squares. *Miss:* Half damage.

Shadow Jaunt (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
Mur Kar teleports 3 squares and becomes insubstantial until the start of his next turn.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Skills Arcana +19, Stealth +15
Str 12 (+8) **Dex** 16 (+10) **Wis** 12 (+8)
Con 18 (+11) **Int** 24 (+14) **Cha** 20 (+12)
Equipment leather armor, *inescapable longsword* (*Adventurer's Vault*™, page 70)

Captain Blackleaf: *Velvet Song* spends more time in port than *Chaos Raven* and *Mist of Shadows* put together. It seems Captain Blackleaf has made a name for himself performing songs in local taverns, especially the Edgewater. Rumor is he seeks a buyer for his ship so that he can retire from the business of raiding and settle into the songcraft in which he has found renewed interest. He is often in the company of an energetic woman named Parcilia Keshar, apparently a rich citizen of Abmelech Island (but see more on Parcilia under "Jade Gyre" below).

Farkus Island

Farkus Island enjoys a mixed reputation in Red Shoals. This rich island can host powerful travelers from the Elemental Chaos in style, especially rich ones. However, the comforts of Farkus Island are bought on the backs of the slave trade that serves as the islands' primary export. Farkus Island is administered by Maeryn the Whip, a hard-eyed dwarf female who can size up a slave's value within seconds. Maeryn's personal bodyguard and chief slave overseer is Stoneheart, an earth archon.

Stoneheart, Earth Archon **Level 17 Brute**
Medium elemental humanoid (earth) XP 1,600
Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +13; tremorsense 20
HP 204; **Bloodied** 102
AC 29; **Fortitude** 31, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 29
Immune disease, petrification, poison
Speed 6 (earth walk)

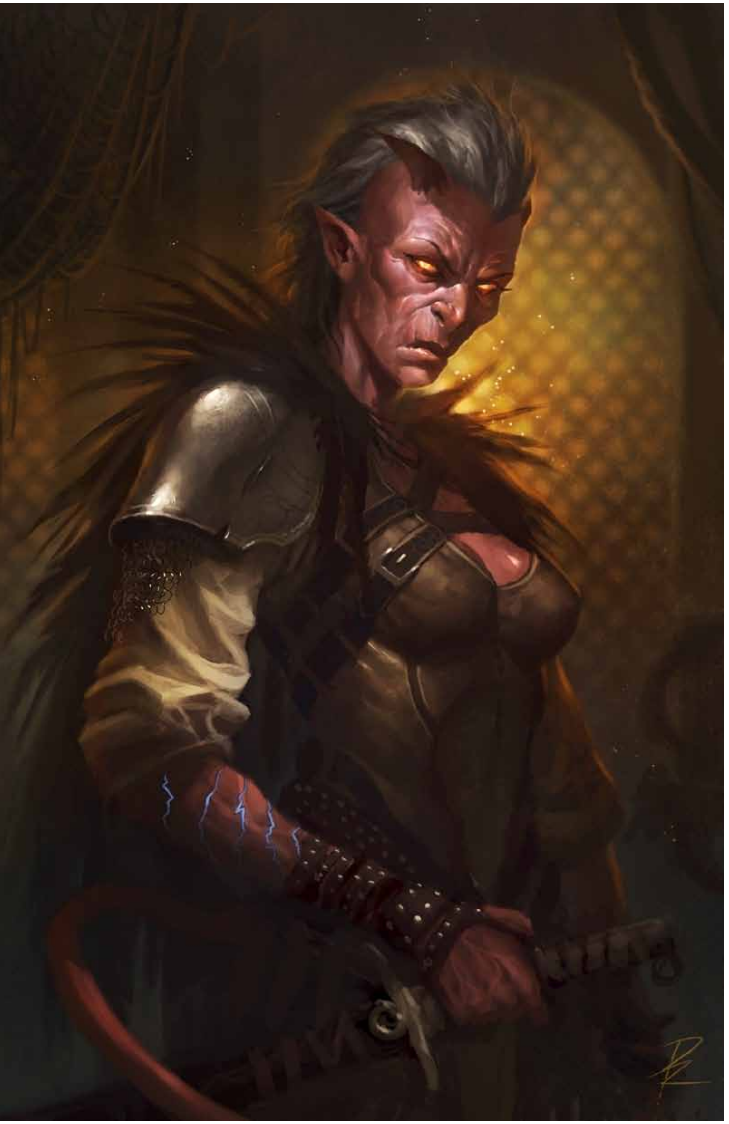
Stone Warhammer (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+20 vs. AC; 2d12 + 9 damage.

Dazing Strike (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅)
Close burst 2; +18 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 9 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). A target with a slave collar must roll a d20 twice and take the lower result when making a saving throw against this effect.

Slave Taker ✦ **Thunder**
Stoneheart's attack deals 2d8 extra thunder damage if it is attacking a creature wearing a slave collar that was fitted while it was on Farkus Island.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Primordial
Str 24 (+15) **Dex** 18 (+12) **Wis** 21 (+13)
Con 24 (+15) **Int** 15 (+10) **Cha** 17 (+11)
Equipment warhammer

The only law Farkus Island abides by is the Law of the Mark—anyone who bears the Mark of Dkar never need fear a collar fitted on Farkus Island. Or so claims Maeryn.



The slave market in the central (and only) city on Farkus is always brisk, even in the middle of darkest night. Permanent teleportation circles set in the slave market sometimes sparkle into life, providing access to a specific courtyard in the City of Brass where slaves are similarly bought and sold. In fact, Farkus Island might be one of the City of Brass's largest suppliers of enforced labor.

Several ships sail out of Farkus Island to raid for warm bodies in the world, but the two best known craft are *Slight Bastard* (captained by a halfling named Thamus) and *Chain Bounty* (captained by Red Marjorie, who sometimes looks like a woman, other times a bat-winged demon). The crew all bears the spiral lightning mark of Dkar.

Captain Thamus: His ship's name, *Slight Bastard*, is a play on Thamus's own diminutive stature. Having faced the subtle prejudice taller folks have "heaped" on him all his life, Thamus enjoys nothing more than enslaving humans and others of equal stature. For him, it's personal, and few in his own crew who are not diminutively sized themselves can long stand up to the captain's scorn. Though the Law of the Mark keeps his crew safe from being seized as slaves, no law keeps him from making "stubborn" crew dance the hempen jig for the least of slights.

Captain Red Marjorie: The *Chain Bounty* is one of the few ships capable of not only sailing terrestrial seas, but also the fluctuating tempest of elements that boil beyond the storm walls. Bearing a mysterious orb known as an *anarch sphere* (*Prince of Undeath*™, page 24), the *Chain Bounty* can pass from a body of water into the swirling, sometimes empty maelstrom of the Elemental Chaos, and even (it is rumored) into the Abyss. If the later is true, the ichor stains, scorch marks, and frequent need for Red Marjorie to replenish her crew after taking a load of slaves for sale makes more sense.

Most people believe that Red Marjorie is a sort of shape-shifting demon or demon-kin, a rumor on which the captain is happy to trade. In truth, she's a doppelganger who takes on a demonic visage. This helps cow slaves in her hold, buyers and sellers, her own crew, and rival captains who might think twice about taking on a ship captained by a demon.

Red Marjorie, Doppelganger Level 15 Elite Lurker
Medium natural humanoid (shapechanger) XP 2,400

Initiative +16 **Senses** Perception +8
HP 222; **Bloodied** 111
AC 31; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 29
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

⊕ **Dagger** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+20 vs. AC; 2d6 + 6 damage.

Double Attack (standard; at-will)
Red Marjorie makes two dagger attacks. If she hits two different targets with the attacks, one of the targets of her choice is dazed (save ends).

Shapeshifter Feint (minor; at-will)
+18 vs. Reflex; Red Marjorie gains combat advantage against the target until the end of her next turn.

Cloud Mind (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Charm**
Close burst 5; +16 vs. Will; Red Marjorie is invisible to the target (save ends).

Combat Advantage
Red Marjorie deals 3d6 extra damage against any target granting combat advantage to her.

Change Shape (minor; at-will) ✦ **Polymorph**
Red Marjorie can alter her physical form to appear as any Medium humanoid, including a unique individual (see Change Shape, *Monster Manual* page 280).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Skills Bluff +16, Insight +13, Stealth +15
Str 12 (+8) **Dex** 21 (+12) **Wis** 12 (+8)
Con 15 (+9) **Int** 13 (+8) **Cha** 19 (+11)
Equipment dagger

The Mark of Dkar

This scarlike tattoo appears as a jagged spiral. Bearers share a special bond with the permanent storm sheltering the Red Shoals of Dkar. Someone with the mark is immune to the effects of the particular chaos storm surrounding Red Shoals. Moreover, a mark bearer is transferred from the Elemental Chaos into the world when they pass out of the eye of the storm when the storm's predominant color is red (an event that occurs approximately once every three days). The location of the portal endpoint in the world changes with every opening. Sometimes the endpoint shifts only by yards, other times by miles or the spans of continents.

The "portal" does not appear as a physical opening, but instead manifests as a blot of swirling storm, which remains open for up to 6 hours. Anyone with the Mark of Dkar knows to the second when the opening back to Red Shoals will close, and to the inch where they must be to travel by using the portal. If even one person aboard a ship that passes through a portal storm or storm wall bears a mark, the entire ship, its contents, and its passengers make the trip (in either direction).

Finally, anyone bearing the Mark of Dkar who speaks of, names, or describes the Red Shoals of Dkar to anyone other than another mark bearer drops to 0 hit points. (The Mark of Dkar can be removed by a Remove Affliction ritual if successfully performed against a 23rd-level effect.)

Marks are gained by traversing the Maze of Dkar at the center of the eye.

Dragon Island

The dragon of Dragon Island is an elder iron dragon (*Monster Manual*™ 2, page 84) whose true name is hidden, but who enjoys the title Iron Mercy. Iron Mercy's island is not particularly welcoming to raiders or trade, except for those raiders who serve her completely and turn over the greater portion of their takes as tribute to be added to Iron Mercy's hoard. Iron Mercy sometimes invites important captains and heads of other islands to Dragon Island to enjoy a rare feast prepared by Iron Mercy's servitors. Most invited attend, because the iron dragon is one of the most powerful creatures to lair in the Red Shoals, and no one wants to get on her bad side. After all, she has sunk more than a couple raider ships from other islands for perceived slights.

Besides a scattering of humanoid servitors pledged to serve the dragon (as well as several slaves), the island sometimes seems overrun with iron dragon hatchlings and young iron dragons (*Monster Manual 2*, page 84). Iron Mercy is prolific; however, she knows space in Red Shoals is limited, and to keep the dragon population under control, she sponsors yearly dragon hunts. For one day, representatives from each island are permitted to land and hunt dragons. Those who succeed must hand over the body, but they are given a pick from Iron Mercy's hoard in recompense.

Coin and Claw is the only ship that runs under Iron Mercy's flag (which shows a stylized iron dragon on a field of red). *Coin and Claw* is captained by Ferrick Spark.

Captain Ferrick Spark: The male genasi captain of *Coin and Claw* commands a handpicked crew of humanoids loyal to Iron Mercy—a loyalty that is enforced by the shipboard presence of an adult iron dragon (*Monster Manual 2*, page 84) named Graytalon; Graytalon is of Iron Mercy's brood, and he sees to it that his mother's interests are always represented.

Captain Ferrick takes *Coin and Claw* out when word returns that the storm portal endpoint has opened near a large city. Only the treasuries of rich nobles, merchants, and kings interest Iron Mercy, and by extension, her raiders. More than a few contents of petty (and not so petty) king's vaults have been pilfered from the world and now reside in a place of honor in Iron Mercy's hoard.

Ferrick Spark, Genasi	**Level 15 Elite Brute**
Medium elemental humanoid	XP 2,400
Initiative +8	**Senses** Perception +9
HP 358; **Bloodied** 179	
AC 28; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 24	
Resist 15 lightning	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 6	
Action Points 1	
Falchion (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning, Weapon**	
+18 vs. AC; 2d4 + 9 damage (crit 4d4 + 14), and ongoing 5 lightning damage (save ends).	
Double Attack (standard; at-will)	
Ferrick makes two falchion attacks. If he hits two different targets, each target takes ongoing 10 lightning damage instead of ongoing 5 lightning damage (save ends).	
Electric Riposte (immediate reaction, when the genasi is hit by an attack; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**	
Targets an enemy adjacent to Ferrick; +18 vs. Reflex; the target takes ongoing 10 lightning damage (save ends). If the target is already taking ongoing lightning damage, that damage increases by 5.	
Lightning Surge (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Lightning**	
Close burst 1; +18 vs. Reflex; the target takes ongoing 10 lightning damage (save ends), and the target takes a -2 penalty to saving throws against ongoing lightning damage until the end of the encounter.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common, Primordial
Skills Endurance +16, Intimidate +12	
Str 22 (+13)	**Dex** 13 (+8) **Wis** 15 (+9)
Con 19 (+11)	**Int** 17 (+10) **Cha** 11 (+7)
Equipment hide armor, falchion	

Ellasar Island

Ellasar Island enjoys a permanently stabilized core. Where Ellasar Fortress is built, however, sandy edges constantly swell and dissolve, creating short-lived fingers of sand that more often than not extend past the storm wall and out into the Elemental Chaos. Thus Ellasar Island serves as a place where traffic, though infrequent, passes between the eye of the storm and into the greater chaos.

However, when the storm wall turns red, fingers of sand bisecting the storm lead instead to the world (at least for those bearing the Mark of Dkar). Instead of forming inconstant storm portals in the world, bridge portals are created. A bridge portal is a path of sand that connects to dry land somewhere in the world.

Thus Ellasar Fortress is one of the most heavily fortified sites in Red Shoals. High stone walls front on the extendable spits of land, just in case hostile visitors from the greater Chaos or the world stumble (or knowingly travel) into the eye of the storm where Red Shoals shelters.

Despite the daunting walls, Ellasar competes with Abmelech for the trade crown in Red Shoals. Those who wish to sell their raided profit but can't find a buyer elsewhere in the eye of the storm prepare caravans to travel through Ellisar into the greater Chaos. The Lord of Ellisar Fortress is an eladrin warlord named Utúlien.

Several mercenary companies operate out of Ellasar Fortress (though all are pledged to turn a portion of their profits to Utúlien). The two most well known are the Circle, led by an eladrin female named Scarvarial, and the Band of the Hand, led by the human male Gannun Crowfeather.

Captain Scarvarial: Though she doesn't command a ship, Scarvarial is accorded just as much respect by her company of specially drilled eladrin warmages. Skilled in both blade and spell, the Circle is a formidable force, and Scarvarial makes excellent coin when she accepts contracts in the Circle's name.

Scarvarial, Eladrin	**Level 15 Elite Skirmisher**
Medium fey humanoid	XP 2,400
Initiative +14	**Senses** Perception +8; low-light vision
HP 292; **Bloodied** 146	
AC 32; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 29	
Saving Throws +2 (+5 against charm effects)	
Speed 8	
Action Points 1	
⊕ **Brilliant Blade** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Radiant, Weapon** +20 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 radiant damage, and the target takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls against Scarvarial until the end of her next turn.	
⸸ **Double Attack** (standard; at-will) Scarvarial makes two brilliant blade attacks. If she hits both times, she can teleport 5 squares.	
⸸ **Crippling Strike** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Weapon** Scarvarial shifts 3 squares before and after making the attack. +18 vs. Fortitude; the target is weakened and slowed (save ends both). *Miss:* The target is slowed (save ends).	
⸸ **Dance of Brilliance** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Radiant, Weapon** +20 vs. AC; 1d8 + 8 radiant damage, and Scarvarial shifts 3 squares and uses brilliant blade against a different target.	
⸸ **Wyvern Strike** (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Poison, Teleportation, Weapon** Scarvarial teleports 10 squares, but might break the trip into two segments. At any point during the teleport, Scarvarial can appear and attack: +18 vs. Fortitude; 1d8 + 8 damage, and ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).	
Combat Shift (minor; requires combat advantage against an enemy adjacent to Scarvarial; at-will 1/round) Scarvarial shifts 1 square to a space adjacent to the enemy.	
Fey Step (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation** Scarvarial teleports 5 squares.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common, Elven
Str 13 (+8)	**Dex** 21 (+12) **Wis** 13 (+8)
Con 18 (+11)	**Int** 15 (+9) **Cha** 18 (+11)
Equipment chainmail, longsword	

Most of the contracts Scarvarial accepts are in the world—even though easy "natural" access to the Red Shoals is too infrequent to be reliable. Once the mercenaries have finished up a particular job, Scarvarial and at least one or two of her lieutenants know the Planar Portal ritual and can return to the safety of Ellisar Fortress at need.

A few years back, one of the Circle's contracts required that it travel into the world and secure a hold filled with an illicit drug known as "travelers dust" (whose users invariably end up dead after first becoming addicted). The Circle commandeered the hold, but was foiled in completing its contract because the raider Mur Kar of Abmelech Island and Captain of *Mist of Shadows* double-crossed Scarvarial. Since then, the *Mist of Shadows* and the Circle have engaged in an off-again, on-again skirmish.

Captain Gannun Crowfeather: Like the Circle, the Band of the Hand mercenaries travel only by ship when they take a commission by someone who owns one. Unlike the circle, the Band of the Hand doesn't seem particularly concerned with the nature of the contract they accept—they have no qualms about murdering apparent innocents, as long as the Band is paid. Since the entire economy of Red Shoals is based on thievery, no other group has found the moral ground to oppose Captain Crowfeather; however, as more stories of contracts taken on behalf of demons and massacres of children make the rounds, someone might well challenge the group. If Crowfeather has any allies at all, it is Red Marjorie and Thamus of Farkus Island, as well as the island's administrator, Maeryn the Whip.

Jade Gyre

Lacking knowledge on how to stabilize one of the impermanent shoals, the ambitious tiefling called Jade created an artificial "island" from lashed-together rafts, driftwood, and barely seaworthy ships. Thus Jade Gyre was born. Also called the Drifting Island, the impermanent nature of the structure means it is dangerous to move too far across its expanse, lest an unexpected wave knock a citizen through one of the many gaps in the city's "surface" and into the cold unforgiving waves.

As such, Jade Gyre has become a place filled with Red Shoal's undesirables, which indicates a higher level of danger given that most of Red Shoal's "desirable" inhabitants are happy to be called raiders, pirates, and worse. For the most part, undesirables in Jade Gyre include escaped slaves, those suffering from strange afflictions or curses, and those who've run afoul one of the other island administrators, captains, or other politically powerful personages.

Because Jade Gyre lies outside the trading relationships, such as they are, that most of the islands enjoy, it now also houses the secret headquarters to a group interested in stamping out the activities of the Raiders of Dkar. Composed of only a handful of people, the so-called Gyre Wardens want to find ways to put an end to the activities the Red Shoals allows. So far, their attempts have been mild, but as their failures mount, so does their desperation to take meaningful actions.

The Gyre Wardens are led by a human woman named Parcilia Keshar. Parcilia is a devotee of Ioun, though few enough in Red Shoals know it. Currently, Parcilia assumes the role of a rich citizen of Abmelech Island. What started as a spying mission on one of Abmelech's most prolific raiders (Captain Blackleaf) developed into an actual relationship. Blackleaf doesn't realize Parcilia's true goals and might be put off to realize that her encouragement to give up raiding and pursue his "music" might be more than personally motivated.

Maze of Dkar

At the center of the storm's eye sits a barren, twisted mass of stone. Every other land mass within the eye is either temporary or magically stabilized. Only the Maze is permanent. It remains permanent because this mass of half-submerged stone is the focus of the entire storm that surrounds Red Shoals—it somehow generates and mystically maintains the chaos storm.

Some sages in Red Shoals recognize that the Maze is a bit of Elemental Chaos flotsam that draws the permanent storm all around it. They guess that deeper secrets lie within this heavily tunneled stone. A few have experienced disquieting dreams regarding the great mass. These dreams, or nightmares, reveal how the twisted, seamed, and compacted gray stone is the severed head of the ancient, dead, mummified, and petrified primordial named Dkar.

These dreams, or nightmares, reveal how the twisted, seamed, and compacted gray stone is the severed head of the ancient, dead, mummified, and petrified primordial named Dkar.

Regardless of whether these dreams touch on a deeper truth or are subconscious fancy, no one denies the power that the "island" can confer on anyone hardy enough to dare its narrow, tunneled mazes. These seekers want to find the stone's heart, which is a glowing red stone that transfers a jagged spiral mark once it is touched. The raiders informally call this stone the Heartstone.

Those seeking the Heartstone can attempt a skill challenge to simulate success or failure in attempting to reach the center of Maze. Unfortunately, maps are of little use, since the most expedient route changes day by day.

Gaining the Mark

Waves smash upon the twisted, fused gray stone of the island called Dkar's Maze. A dozen or more tunnels plunge into the island's interior. Some shine with strange illumination, and others are completely dark. It's up to the adventurers to choose which route to take into the Maze.

In this challenge, the adventurers must enter one of the tunnels and make their way into the island's center by intuiting the best route while avoiding the dangers that beset them.

Level: 11 (XP 3,000).

Complexity: 5 (requires 12 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Arcana, Athletics, Dungeoneering, Nature, Perception.

Acrobatics (DC 16 or 21): After the first success using Acrobatics, the DC increases to 21. Shifting floors, falling stones, and the ability to squeeze through openings by folding one's body just so (or helping an ally do the same) become important on

a couple of occasions while spelunking through the Maze's tunnels.

Arcana or Nature (DC 16 or 21): After the first success using either Arcana or Nature, the DC increases to 21. Is that odd glow magical fire or phosphorescent algae? Does the odor of sulfur wafting up the passage to the left presage a dangerous obstacle or a natural occurrence? And what about these odd stone marks—magical glyphs, or just how this kind of mineral looks when scratched? Avoiding the dangers helps the adventurers farther into the Maze.

Athletics (DC 16 or 21): After the first success using Athletics, the DC increases to 21. A rough wall, a deep rock chimney, or a wide chasm that must be jumped are all challenges that adventurers must face when wending toward the Heartstone.

Maze Island is indeed the remnant of a bound primordial named Dkar.

Dungeoneering (DC 16 or 21): After the first success using Dungeoneering, the DC increases to 21. When deciding between which of the plethora of tunnels might provide the best entry, someone's general knowledge of tunnel grade, size, and "feel" is a benefit to all.

Perception (DC 21): Odd noises, dire smells, movements of air, and hidden secondary tunnels make movement deeper and deeper into the bowels of Maze Island a job suited for someone with sharp senses.

Success: The adventurers reach the center of the Maze. They consequently gain a jagged spiral tattoo somewhere on their bodies, as well as the benefits that go with having such a mark. See the Mark of Dkar sidebar on page 85 for more information on the mark, and the Chamber of the Heartstone below for conditions in the final chamber.

Failure: The adventurers are injured by a collapsing tunnel that sends them back to the surface to try another route, and start all over again. Each adventurer loses 1 healing surge, and worse, finds an awakened Avatar of Dkar back on the island's surface ready eager to deal with the intruders. See Waking the Avatar below for statistics on the wakened guardian.

Chamber of the Heartstone

The correct route into Maze Island finally leads to the Chamber of the Heartstone.

This roughly spherical chamber is sheathed in quartz crystal. A ten-foot-diameter scarlet stone pulses in the center of the bowllike floor of the chamber, dimming and brightening over the course of several natural heartbeats.

Anyone who doesn't already have the Mark of Dkar who touches the red crystal takes ongoing 10 damage (save ends). When the target finally saves, a new lightning spiral tattoo now adorns its flesh.

The red crystal is as vulnerable to damage as any large stone, but if any visitors begin to smash away at it, the entire complex animates and mimics the effects of a stomach regurgitating all its contents back to the surface. Creatures subjected to this unpleasant mode of travel lose 2 healing surges, fall prone on the surface, and stand up in the presence of an awakened Avatar of Dkar.

Avatar of Dkar **Level 15 Solo Soldier**
Huge natural magical beast XP 6,000
Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +12; darkvision
Lightning Storm aura 5; each enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes 10 lightning damage.
HP 596; **Bloodied** 298
AC 31; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 26
Immune disease, petrification, poison; **Resist** 15 lightning, 15 thunder
Saving Throws +5
Speed 6, fly 8 (hover)
Action Points 2
⊕ **Lightning Trawl** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Reach 3; +22 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 lightning damage.
Thunderous Strike (standard; at-will) ✦ **Thunder**
Reach 3; +20 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 6 thunder damage.
Avatar Blitz (standard; at-will)
The avatar of Dkar makes a *lightning trawl* attack against each enemy within reach. It also attacks one creature with a *thunderous strike*.
Envelop (standard; recharges when no creature is affected by this power)
Reach 3; +20 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 6 damage, and a Medium or smaller target is enveloped. An enveloped target is grabbed and restrained. An enveloped creature has line of sight and line of effect only to the avatar, and no creature has line of sight or line of effect to it. A creature that escapes the grab is no longer enveloped and appears in a space adjacent to the avatar. An avatar can move normally while it has a target grabbed in this way. When the avatar is destroyed, the target can escape as a move action, appearing in the avatar's former space. *Sustain Minor:* The avatar sustains the grab, and the target takes 15 damage.
Howling Winds (standard; at-will)
Close burst 5; +20 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target falls prone.
Storm Lash (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Lightning**
Close blast 5; +20 vs. Reflex; 3d10 + 7 lightning damage, and the target is dazed until the end of its next turn. *Miss:* Half damage.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Primordial
Str 22 (+13) **Dex** 21 (+12) **Wis** 20 (+12)
Con 21 (+12) **Int** 6 (+5) **Cha** 12 (+8)

Other Islands

A handful of other permanent and semipermanent islands also exist in Red Shoals, as well as two or three times as many actual shoals whose existence rarely exceeds more than a few months.

Temple Island: Several temples crowd this small island. The largest temple is sacred to Melora, and many of the devout in Red Shoals hold her as most sacred. The head priest of Melora's temple in Red Shoals is an elf named Taveral Silkwave.

Demon Island: What used to be the private island of a wizard named Garderian of the Seven Wands is now a blasted expanse of dense sand holding the ruin of a wizard's tower from which horrendous, demonic screams regularly sound. No one knows what has become of Garderian, because no one has had the curiosity or courage to do much more than sail by the island and wonder.

The Dump: This collection of refuse has grown over the years from the place where other islands dumped their garbage to a visible, growing heap of stagnation and filth. Many believe that a colony of ghouls have somehow gained a foothold in the refuse pile, and it's only a matter of time before one or more of them find their way to a populated island and wreak mayhem.

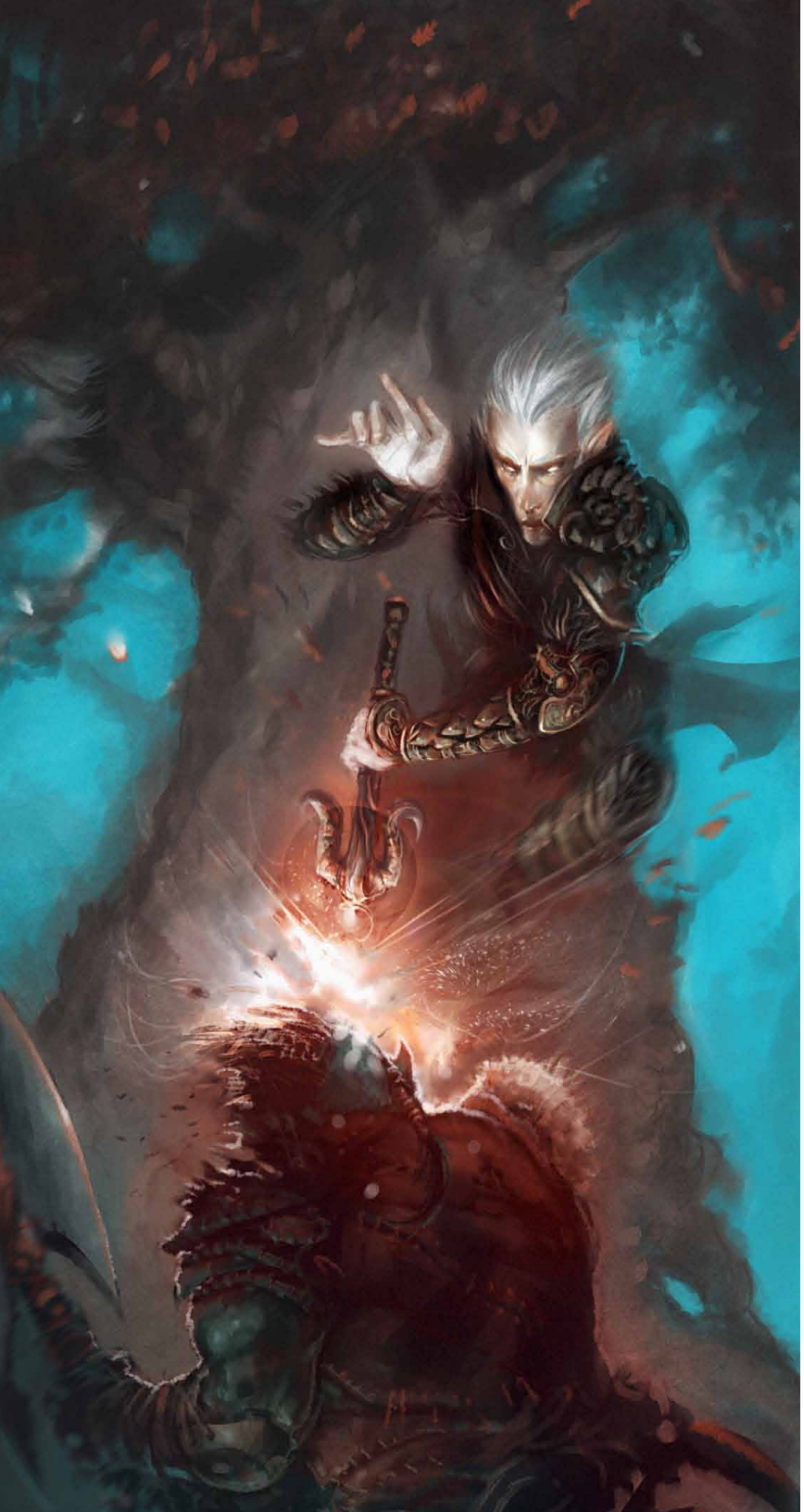
Waking the Avatar

Maze Island is indeed the remnant of a bound primordial named Dkar. Dkar is unlikely ever to make a reappearance. If it did, all Red Shoals would be destroyed as it absorbed material all around it to form a new elemental body for itself. However, lesser versions of Dkar do wake from time to time (when those attempting the Mark of the Heartstone skill challenge fail, and when those who succeed physically attack the Heartstone).

An avatar of Dkar appears as a distinct blot of boiling stormcloud constantly sparking with lightning, rumbling with thunder, and flashing odd, chaotic colors. Between peals of thunder, the visage of a furious humanoid face briefly resolves before being wiped away by the next onslaught.

About the Author

Bruce R. Cordell is an Origins and ENnie award-winning game designer whose long list of professional credits include the new Forgotten Realms® *Campaign Guide, Keep on the Shadowfell*™, *Draconomicon*™: *Chromatic Dragons* and *Open Grave: Secrets of the Undead*™. Bruce is also an author of Forgotten Realms novels, including *Plague of Spells*, first book in the Abolethic Sovereignty series.



Sealing the Pact

By Jeff Morgenroth and Arnie Franke

illustration by Jorge Lacera

"You've made a wise decision, my friend.
Now sign here, and we'll discuss the trivial issue of
the payment I'll be asking in return for the feats of power
you'll be able to perform."

–Belphegor of the Broken Horn

This article explores the opportunity provided by a warlock's pact as an impetus for unique adventures. This includes advice on ways you can work with a warlock's player to develop a patron using material from *Dragon* #381's "Performing the Pact," as well as a few key points to consider when designing adventures based around that patron. You'll find guidelines on how to bring the warlock's inhuman patron to life, complete with roleplaying suggestions and tips for wielding its immense power in ways that will appeal to your group.

Developing a Warlock's Patron

"Performing the Pact" contains everything a warlock player needs to develop his own patron, so let them do most of the work. Still, this can be a collaborative process. Give the player an idea of what the campaign's starting point will be, as well as what will work with your group's gaming style. You might feel that one pact fits your campaign's theme better than others, but try to give your player the ability to let his imagination take charge. Different players will be drawn to different pacts, and you should find ways to accommodate their enjoyment. Work with your player to make a seemingly impossible background more practical.

Once your player has a basic character concept, have him explain the patron to you in detail, including a few specific goals and story points, with the ultimate goal of describing the moment when the character made the pact. Run with these ideas. Flesh out details in the story and add some twists of your own (and be sure to keep some private, since no patron would reveal *every* detail of its plans to the fledgling warlock servitor. Take the patron's goals to places the player would never expect, and add your own elements to the patron's personality. Evil patrons exhibiting moments of compassion or good patrons capable of sudden cruelty will make these entities more unpredictable and dangerous. The goal here is compromise: You want a patron that has the core elements of your player's imagination, supplemented by ideas you'll be able to build on to create adventures and story arcs of your own.

Finally, determine where the patron resides within the game world, and how it contacts its warlock to instigate adventures.

Designing Adventures with Patrons

Incorporating a warlock patron into adventures requires some unique considerations to ensure a fun, smooth game experience.

Incorporating Patrons

First consider the importance you want to assign the patron in the scope of the campaign.

Brief Appearances. This is the most common level of involvement for a campaign, since allowing a patron a brief influence gives you the ability to introduce a large variety of plots and quests. Patrons in this campaign appear infrequently, and when they do, stick around only for short periods. This might mean that the PCs undertake adventures pertaining to a patron's goals every few levels, or that the patron's influence is felt during an unrelated narrative. The patron's goals for these adventures are usually limited, so when the group concludes the adventure, they can move on to the next feeling satisfied. This adventure model is conventional and attractive to most players for its simplicity, but can still establish the patron as a powerful force in the adventurers', and especially the warlock's, careers.

Ongoing Involvement. This model puts the patron or its influence in the foreground of an ongoing narrative. Their goals and personality greatly impact the entire party. Here, a patron's schemes take years of game time to unravel, pitting PCs against the patron's foes, their own morality, or the patron itself. Advanced planning can help you foreshadow future adventures, use thematic storytelling, and build dramatic tension. In an arc, the presence of the patron should slowly become more important, as events build across adventures to a climax. The best warlock adventure arcs emphasize an antagonistic patron, which sets the stage for dark, edgy decision making that tests the party at every turn.

Portraying a Patron

Next, think about how the patron will interact with the characterss.

Subtle Presence. Here the patron's presence is barely felt. Characters have the sensation of being watched or followed, or witness events that point toward the patron's involvement. The patron never directly impacts the narrative; it allows the warlock and her allies to act out of fear or faith. Any instructions given by the patron are sudden, cryptic, and ominous. Use this option to build tension and mystery, or to introduce clues or hooks for players to pick up on that point toward other hooks and adventures. This lets the players know that the patron is out there, scheming to unknown ends, but nevertheless actively involved.

Dynamic Engagement. This option openly reveals the patron. The patron's words, actions, and influence become a catalyst to adventure. A patron candidly asks characters (and specifically the warlock adventurer) to undertake quests, threatening them into obedience if necessary. Its power can be plainly demonstrated, but do not attack the characters; rather, use a patron's might or influence to demonstrate its power to the players' allies or associated NPCs. Use this demonstration to create plot hooks for the players to act on. Make it clear that this is a being of advanced power, able to make their lives interesting at best, and miserable at worst. The goal isn't to torture uncooperative characters, but to give them incentives to pursue these adventures, just as you would with other hooks. Most players will enjoy seeing and interacting with these mighty, otherworldly entities, and you can use them to create gravitas, panic, awe, and wonder. It also helps if the goals of the patron line up with the overall goals of the adventurers—you don't want the players to feel like their characters are acting in a non-heroic or immoral way just to satisfy some evil creature.

Sharing the Spotlight

The warlock player will occupy a large share of your attention when you run a patron-themed adventure; however, keeping everyone included will not only make the party happy but make the story more entertaining as well.

Mutual Interest. A patron's plotting should always have ramifications, affecting people other than just the warlock. Design adventures with goals that the whole party wants to accomplish, and use their sensibilities to hook the other players into a plot that might otherwise be "just for the warlock." For example, an enemy the patron wants eliminated might also be a recurring villain the heroes have already tangled with. What the characters don't know is that eliminating this villain creates a power vacuum that the patron plans to fill with one of its own minions—someone who could become the next recurring villain in your campaign!

Insidious Patrons. To a vain and selfish patron, even warlocks are mere pawns, so why should the party be any different? Look for ways in which the patron can exploit other party members' desires, strengths, or weaknesses. This presents a fun role-playing experience, since characters can interact with a patron directly. Be prepared for passionate character building as players stand up to antagonistic patrons. Others might make pacts with the patron of their own, taking warlock multiclass or hybrid feasts. Either way, you show that the patron has an interest in the whole party, not just the warlock.

Patron Appearances

Though a patron might be playing a big role in an adventure, the warlock and the party must always remain in the spotlight. Patrons shouldn't force the party's actions, nor show up to rescue them. They might be able to, given their power, but a patron will seem more mysterious if the players wonder what their worth is to the patron. Focus on players by highlighting their opinions and decision making in regards to what the patron wants. Don't force the warlock player into asking, "Why doesn't the patron just do this itself?"

Using Quests

It's now time to create a series of quests to translate these ideas into the framework of the game. Patrons offer a rich resource for creating unique quests, with goals and themes that change depending on the warlock's relationship with her patron.

Patron as Ally

If the warlock and the patron share goals, beliefs, or alignments, create quests that put the party into a position where they can help or will be helped by the patron. Usually these quests immediately appeal to the characters, and frame the success of the patron's goals as being important to those of the characters. The patron's relationship with the party takes on that of a teacher or mentor, one who can help the party mature through tiers of play as well as send them on important adventures.

Major Quests. Protect a site, creature, or object important to the patron. Seek information or magical lore desired by the patron. Defeat an enemy threatening the patron.

Minor Quests. Uphold ideals held by the patron. Foster a self-enriching relationship with the patron. Learn legends of the patron's past. Establish friendships with creatures allied with the patron. Protect or spread the patron's reputation.

Patron as Antagonist

This patron becomes a menacing figure, one whose morality, goals, and alignment are opposed to the majority of the party. They create problems for the party and those around them, directly or through servants. Create quests that have the characters thwarting the patron's plans, or struggling against trials the patron creates for them. They should not

constantly harass or impede the characters, but rather be used as a device to provide them with an intimate, ongoing enemy lurking in the shadows of their adventures. All the while, the warlock character continues to draw on the benefit of the pact, holding the patron to its end of the bargain despite his actions—but knowing that there will inevitably be consequences.

Major Quests. Intercept monsters or agents sent by the patron. Protect a person or site from the patron's influence. Obey a patron's commands without compromising alignment or morality. Keep a vital object or knowledge out of the patron's hands.

Minor Quests. Ward off a patron's corrupting influence. Expose the patron's secrets and use them against it. Conceal your pact when necessary. Protect something loathed by the patron. Strengthen institutions or allies opposed to the patron.

Patron as Meddler

A meddling patron fills a unique middle-ground between allied and antagonistic patrons. The patron may or may not share goals or alignment with the party, but it is neither hostile nor benevolent enough to direct the narrative. Instead, these patrons stick their noses into the characters' business when it suits their whim. The adventurers become playthings for the inscrutable patron to assist, bother, or otherwise meddle with at inopportune times. How the characters decide to handle these situations help shape later quests. This is an attractive choice early on in a warlock's career, when a relationship with a patron is being developed. Over the course of play, the patron might decide that it likes the party (because its goals and theirs align), and become an ally—or that the misbehaving mortals need to be punished. Use a variety of minor quests incorporated into ongoing narratives to help develop the relationships between the patron, warlock, and party members.

Minor Quests. Deal with a sub-plot put into motion by a patron's meddling. Establish meaningful relationships during and after a sub-plot. Discover the patron's goals or vices and use them to keep the patron out of affairs. Encounter NPCs or creatures allied with the patron.

A Patron's Rewards

Players love seeing material rewards for their actions—and a pleased patron is a perfect way to give characters unique treasures or other rewards.

Treasure. Reward players with treasure parcels sent by the patron. Swapping out loot normally found during an adventure with this treasure can be stylistic and evocative. Though the party is banking the same amount of wealth, perceptions of where the loot came from become more meaningful. You can use these "gifts" as plot points as well, using them to start adventures or put the party into harm's way. The warlock player might claim ownership of these items, which is fine. You can compensate by allocating attractive items for other party members with other treasure parcels.

Creatures. Another exciting way to reward characters is with the appearance of a patron-themed monster that will aid them in a battle. Most players find battling alongside monsters a thrilling experience. You can also use these monsters to creatively assist the party in a skill challenge or with clues or information relating to a current adventure. To keep an encounter with a monstrous ally balanced, compensate by increasing its difficulty by one or two levels. If you think the warlock player is up to the challenge, let her control the monster. This will not only be a blast for the player, but free up some of your attention.

Timing

A patron-themed minor quest might show up when least expected. This could be in the midst of an unrelated battle, or firmly entrenched in another adventure. Minor quests should be used to develop the world, patron, and characters. In the course of a story arc, it's often fun to begin a patron-driven adventure just before a level in which the characters gain a new daily power. This gives the player a feeling of accomplishment, as well as the sense that this exciting new power is a gift from his patron as a reward for a job well done.

A Patron's Punishments

Angry patrons give you a nearly limitless excuse to make things happen. If incorporated smartly, punishments create depth to a campaign and help you craft memorable drama.

When to punish. Patrons are not omniscient, so most of the warlock's actions go beneath their notice. Additionally, most patrons are so complex that they simply don't care what the warlock does—so long as they obey. However, if a player actively makes decisions contrary to a patron's will, they should expect it to come back to them. Just be sure punishments don't railroad the party or foster resentment for the warlock character's player.

Patron capabilities. Patrons do not control what a character says, does, or is capable of. Never burden the warlock or party with penalties to die rolls, rob them of powers or items, or use magical domination to force them into things they wouldn't do normally; how a player handles consequences of the pact is their choice.

Forms of punishment. Monsters are the easiest way for patrons to hinder the party, because you can use them to create new, balanced encounters. Additionally, you could use a patron's influence to create unexpected challenges within an ongoing narrative. Punishments can also be springboards for new quests and adventures. The PCs may have caught the attention of a patron because of their actions, such as by slaying allies of the patron or trespassing in its domain.

For example, a patron feels insulted by the characters because they had a destructive battle in a site sacred to it. In retaliation, the patron destroys something important to them, like a temple or public area. This causes a civil uprising, and when the patron openly appears to chastise the characters, they find themselves forced to deal with an angry mob led by authority figures blaming them for the destruction. This could lead to any number of adventures, depending on the characters' actions.

Problem Patrons?

If a patron becomes obtrusively needy or a petty bully, you've gone too far. Avoid getting to this point in the first place. Don't use a patron to show the party how tough you are, and remember that patrons are meant to be a tool you can use to make an adventure memorable. If the players aren't into patron-themed encounters, don't include them; the group's fun should always come first.

Sample Adventures

Each pact has different themes and motifs that you can explore. The following sections will help you brainstorm themes, plots, and arcs for patron-based adventures. Each adventure hook uses sample patrons detailed in "Performing the Pact," but could easily be modified for a player's unique patron.

Dark Pact Adventures

These adventures emphasize pain. The characters often act in the role of aggressors. Let the party's morality decide how to best accomplish the patron's goals. Pull no punches when violence occurs, and put the warlock in a position where his powers can inflict agony on villains, allies, and innocents alike.

Themes. Assassination, spitefulness, risks, selfishness, kidnappings, exotic or perverse enemies, revenge, theft.

Yorgrix: Bloated with hate and the souls of countless victims, Yorgrix requires the warlock to strike at its foes beyond the walls of its web-entombed city. Its presence is felt in the silent creeping of arachnid messengers, and it delights vicariously from suffering inflicted by the warlock's powers.

Adventure Hook: Drow from the Underdark city of Aoroon seek vengeance on Yorgrix for its treachery. Knowing that it cannot win a war under the eight-fold eyes of Lolth, Yorgrix commands its warlock disciple to assassinate key leaders among the attackers, chief among them the drow priestess commanding the force, before the attack commences.

Adventure Hook: Millennia of feasting from a cornucopia of victims leaves Yorgrix with a jaded palate. It now demands sweeter meats and charges its warlock to kidnap Athraddis, a dark wizard of great renown, and deliver him onto the stained dais of its feasting hall.

Arc Hook: Yorgrix has developed a taste for arcanists who practice the vilest sorts of magic, each time demanding that one of his followers bring him an arcanist of greater power. Unfortunately for the warlock, whose magic increases with each requisition, the most opulent feast of all has been dangling under Yorgrix's palps for some time—and dark pact warlock is next on the menu.

Fey Pact Adventures

A fey patron's whimsy leads to quests for great beauty or violent mischief, changing without warning because of the patron's impulsive nature. In either case, ends justify means for fey patrons, who view themselves beyond worldly morality. Indulge the warlock's fey side, allowing allure or trickery to influence events—unless cruel magic is called for.

Themes. Magical wonders, amorality, enchantment, sensuality, indifference to the mundane, cultivating beauty, natural splendor.

The Eochaid: Through the chiming of pure streams or the sighing of mystic winds, the Eochaid sets the warlock on quests to please his fey amusement. He is capricious as a storm, and warlocks find satisfying his impulsive whimsy a never-ending challenge.

Adventure Hook: An orc warlord approaches the sacred trees of Iänii Ahvenan, set on felling the grove and using its magical timber to erect a fearsome stronghold. With direct confrontation futile against so large a force, the Eochaid urges the warlock to rely on trickery to inflame the savages' superstition into thinking that the woods themselves are attacking, routing the force before they can lift a single saw.

Adventure Hook: Near the small village of Willowford, the lines between the world and Feywild are mysteriously growing weak, allowing creatures of each plane to accidentally cross into the other—including several confused human children. Outraged by mundane creatures trespassing into the perfect forests of the Feywild, the Eochaid sends the warlock through the mists to track down and return these "eyeblights" to the banality and ugliness of the world.

Arc Hook: The incursions continue, and the Eochaid decides to put an end to the problem by ordering a purge of the forest and its surroundings of potential interlopers. Does the warlock agree to this impulsive demand to preserve the Feywild, or does she resist the coldness of the Eochaid and protect the villagers from her patron's other servants?

Infernal Pact Adventures

The high-stakes nature of the infernal pact offers the potential for tremendous drama, intrigue, and violence. Highlight tension between the party and prominent NPCs by bringing up the infernal nature of the warlock and his patron, and give the warlock chances to utterly destroy enemies—body and soul—with his devilish powers.

Themes. Redemption, subversion, manipulation, morality, vice, religious debate, exploitation, demonstrating power.

Prisoner in Iron: Bound in infernal chains for his mortal arrogance, the Prisoner uses a final shred of magic to reach out to living warlocks, directing them on quests to uncover the secrets of his legacy and free his shackled soul.

Adventure Hook: King Morlinon, the ruler of virtuous Sommergard, is desperate to save his only princess from a terrible fate, resorting finally to signing a contract with the fiendish arch-devil Belphegor. The Prisoner wishes to save the good king from the damning fate he himself suffers, dispatching the warlock to find a loophole in the fiend's bureaucracy and save the king's soul.

Adventure Hook: The spirit of the Prisoner urges the characters to travel to the distant barony of Caras Severin, a forgotten realm ruled in secret by cruel descendants of Bael Turath autocrats. Here they must search through ancient libraries that will lead them to an artifact from the Prisoner's mortal life. However, Baron Zodacar and his servants remain steeped in infernal lore, and the group's association with the Prisoner is soon discovered. A chase from the baron's bloodseeker throngs ensues across the wastes as the PCs race to recover the artifact.

Arc Hook: This first discovery is only the beginning, opening the conduit for easier communication between the Prisoner and the warlock. Now, with his freedom in sight, the Prisoner's plea for help sends the warlock on ever more perilous quests, each ending with the discovery of some vital clue or remnant of his mortal life. Once all these artifacts are collected, the breach of the Iron Fortress begins.

Star Pact Adventures

Wise warlocks realize that each of a star patron's demands is a small piece in some impossibly far-reaching scheme. Maintain the patron's alien nature by using a variety of esoteric goals. Let the warlock explore the possibilities of planar realities and plumb the very depths of the madness waiting.

Themes. Questioning reality, fate, monstrous enemies, truth, metaphysics, illusion of free-will, secrets, organizing or thwarting star spawn cults.

Ulban: The comet Ulban soars out of prophesy and the distant future, proclaiming its struggle against the doomed fate of all existence. It reveals magical secrets to warlocks who would use that power to protect it, and stop those who would hasten it.

Adventure Hook: The mysterious and prophesized appearance of the comet Ulban has come to pass. Led by its eldritch iridescence, the warlock is drawn to a mountaintop ruin, long forgotten by the wisest scholars. Here, the warlock encounters other questing rivals, and discovers that only one will be chosen to be included in the comet's otherworldly plans. Will the warlock and her party be the last ones standing?

Adventure Hook: The Stargazer's Journal has returned! These moldering parchments, said to be the half-mad ravings of the astrologer Thulzar, were lost centuries ago. Their mysterious resurgence has drawn the attention of numerous competing star spawn cults, each eager to claim the forbidden lore as their own. The comet Ulban, ever defiant against the star spawn, commands its warlock champion to find the manuscripts before the cultists do.

Arc Hook: Once the journal is in their hands, the warlock and her companions must decide what to do with it. Ulban demands they surrender it—but the forbidden knowledge within the journal is too priceless to give up. Refusing Ulban brings the comet's single-minded wrath upon the warlock and threatens entire regions with calamity at the hands of its messengers.

Vestige Pact Adventures

Vestige warlocks will be called to undertake tasks in accordance with their patron's relationship to vestiges, be they honorable or selfish. Find ways to incorporate flavor from vestige powers as story elements in the adventure, which will lend a sense of scope and history for the warlock.

Themes. Historical mystery, lineages, revelation, closure, uncovering secrets, personal legacy.

The Guidesman: Even in death there are tolls to pay, and the Guidesman would punish those that subvert the orderly transition of souls to the Shadowfell. Though only able to manifest as an eldritch lantern, this signal is enough to set the death-spirit's vestige warlocks into action against necromancers and restless spirits.

Adventure Hook: The battlefield's blood washes away, but faces of the wayward dead still roam the charnel wastes. Seeking release, they wander the outskirts of the losing side's borders hoping to find the Guidesman's guiding light. The divine "heroes" of that realm are resolved to purge these unquiet spirits—but if destroyed before the Guidesman comes for them, the warlock knows that they will rise again, this time aflame with vengeance.

Adventure Hook: The wicker fires die down in Trentshire and autumn's dirges become yule feasts, but not for some. A friend of the characters has died, and this passing heralds mysterious threats. Furtive shadows lurk in the fields, and soon wraiths stalk the empty streets. The deceased's soul knows the secret to the wraiths' appearance, but to commune with the lost soul, the warlock must pass beyond the pale, risking death to stand before the Guidesman once again—for only he is able to bring the departed soul back to be questioned.

Arc Hook: This discovery reveals that the characters departed friend lived a dual life. Apart from their friendly persona, they were the cursed steward of the Orrery of Life's Eclipse, half of an artifact said to be a gateway to its twin in the Shadowfell which rests within the very depths of Maikedhon's Tower. The undead invade until the Orrery is reunited with its shadowy echo, but only the Guidesman knows the way.

About the Authors

Lurking in the outskirts of Seattle, **Jeff Morgenroth** has mastered fires of endless academia and the soulless drudgery of the skittering rat-race, at last making his pact with the baleful entities at Wizards of the Coast. He edited a portion of *Monster Manual*®2, and it is prophesized that his name will defile the pages of more books soon.

Once every five hundred years (starting now) the dark and unnatural clouds vigilantly shrouding the towering heights of **Arnie Franke's** third story apartment dissipate. On these nights, the peasants of Seattle's northlands gather in fearful speculation: "He's an illustrator!" "Copywriter!" "Designer!" "Nay, 'tis written that he toils endlessly as a freelance advertising creative fantastique." Too late these simple folk will realize that Arnie Franke, looking down upon them in smug majesty, is all of these things, and more.

Bringing Skills to Life

by Mike Mearls
Illustration by Raven Mimura

For many DMs, skill challenges feel too mechanical to blend seamlessly into the game. They break the sense of immersion that a good DM creates, the feeling around the table that absorbs the players in the action. If you've ever read a really good book, you know that feeling. The words on the page come to life and for a time you're transported somewhere else, be it the streets of ancient Athens, the dustbowl of 1930s America, or a strange land of magic, dragons, and orcs.

The same thing can happen in D&D, but it takes some effort. Consider the following two examples.

Player: OK, I use *spinning sweep*. Does a 19 hit that guy's AC?

DM: Yeah, that's a hit.

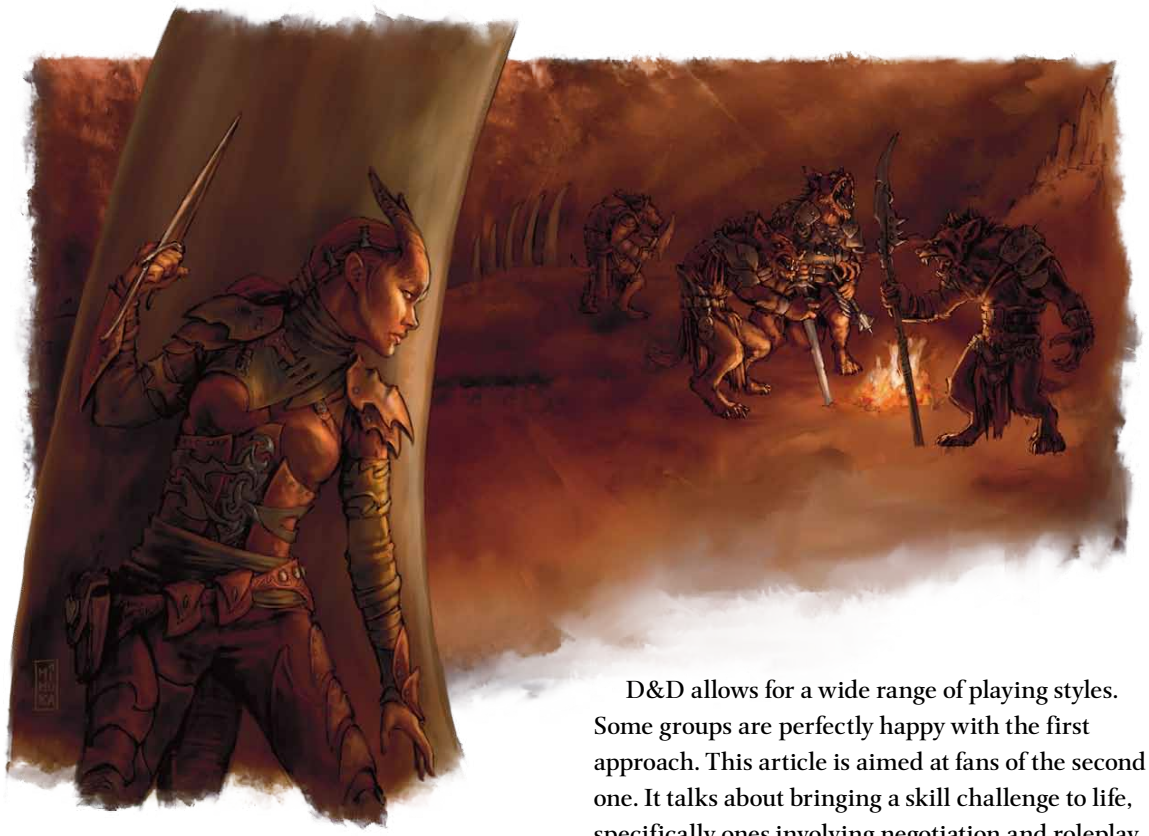
Player: That's 9 damage and he's knocked prone. I'll use an action point to hit him while I have combat advantage.

That's a clear, concise way to describe things, but it also sells short the potential drama and action in the scene. Compare it to this:

Player: Grimthor sweeps his warhammer at the ogre's knees. Does a 19 hit its AC?

DM: Your hammer slams into its knee with a sickening crunch. You hit.

Player: The ogre crashes to the floor, falling prone and taking 9 damage. Grimthor yells, "The Stone Lords shall have their vengeance!" I'll spend an action point and bring my hammer crashing down on the prone ogre's head.



The second example isn't Shakespeare, but it lets everyone at the table draw a clear, evocative picture of what's happening in the game. Investing a little effort in your narration makes the game more enjoyable for everyone.

D&D allows for a wide range of playing styles. Some groups are perfectly happy with the first approach. This article is aimed at fans of the second one. It talks about bringing a skill challenge to life, specifically ones involving negotiation and roleplay.

NPCs and Skill Challenges

When it's time for a skill challenge in your game, nothing breaks immersion faster than moments that bring the mechanics front and center. This problem is particularly vexing when the characters speak with NPCs. Without a good overlay of story and roleplay,

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an NPC is nothing more than a monster with a Diplomacy DC substituted for armor class.

The skill challenge mechanic has the potential to derail immersion and turn what should be an interesting scene into a series of die rolls. If you want to immerse your players in the game, you need to hide the mechanics of the challenge just enough to keep the action flowing without losing the benefits of the mechanical framework it provides. There are a few things you can do to make that happen: Do the prep work on your NPCs, make skill checks a seamless part of the action, and work success and failure into the flow of the game.

Seamless Skill Checks

The second thing that kills immersion is sending the players to their skill lists in search of things to do. That problem is most common when the characters have no real idea of what they want to do or what they are supposed to do.

The first step to keeping things moving in a skill challenge is to give the players immediate, clear options for different actions. In a roleplaying scene, your portrayal of an NPC goes a long way toward that goal. The sage Rallik might be in the middle of dissecting a demon when the characters meet him, and that's a clue that he wants more such creatures for his research. Rumors are also a useful tool. The characters might hear that Rallik has researched magic that's banned in the kingdom or that he owes a crime boss in town several hundred gold pieces.

Even the simplest NPC can come to life with such flourishes. The guard's breath smells of alcohol and the merest mention of his superiors prompts him to complain about the punishments he has received for drinking while on duty. Smart players can use that to drive their decisions.

By creating such details, you give the players a clear cue as to how they might use Charisma or skill checks. Many skill challenges stall when the characters must grasp at straws to figure out how a skill applies to a situation. You avoid that by making the skill checks feel like a seamless outgrowth of the situation.

When it comes time to actually make a check, you have two options. Some players like to announce a skill check and then describe what they do. The second part, the description, is the key to making the scene come to life. Some players prefer to speak in character while others prefer to give a general description of what they say. The best approach depends on your group's preferences.

You can have the players speak in character or describe what they say and then call for appropriate skill checks based on what they said. I use this method in my games and prefer it because it pulls the players a little deeper into character and encourages them to think about their characters' in-game action before calculating which skill to use. Again, there's no right answer, just what works best for your group.

The Roleplaying Stat Block

A standard stat block summarizes attacks, defenses, powers, and so on. That's the one you're accustomed to seeing. A roleplaying stat block provides a similar summary of how an NPC acts, his motivations, his goals, and so on. The roleplaying stat block is a simple set of notes that you create for each NPC in a skill challenge. It serves as an easy guide to the hooks and prompts for skill checks as described above. Here's an example:

Name: The False Burne
Key Traits: Authoritative, long-winded, florid, powerful
Goal: Remain hidden at all costs, spy on the characters, find the black book
Motivation: To please Iuz and thereby gain power and wealth
Fears: Displeasing Iuz, discovery, imprisonment
Weaknesses: Underestimates others, overestimates himself

The false Burne is a character from my *Temple of Elemental Evil* campaign; it's a doppelganger who took the place of the wizard Burne. In the campaign, the doppelganger tried to trick the characters into handing over a book they had discovered. The doppelganger works for Iuz, a demigod in the world of Greyhawk.

The stat block is a simple list of traits and features for an NPC. Just like a combat stat block, its purpose is to give you an easy way to sort out how the NPC should act and react toward the characters in the midst of an encounter.

The key traits are general guidelines for roleplaying. Pick those that are directly useful during a scene. I like to pick three traits that describe how the NPC would use Bluff, Diplomacy, and Intimidate. In this example, the false Burne uses his knowledge and expertise to pass off lies, claiming superior knowledge and study. When seeking to impress others, he uses formal, long-winded speeches. For Intimidation, he draws on his position and influence in town to make threats.

The other entries should be self-explanatory. The NPC's goal is what he wants to achieve, while motivation indicates why he wants to achieve it. The NPC's fears and weaknesses play an obvious role, but they also have a mechanical use. As a rule of thumb, the characters can use a fear to Intimidate the NPC, while weaknesses are the perfect fodder for Bluff attempts.

It helps to include just enough detail to suggest something beyond a bland, simple trait. For instance, look at the false Burne's fears. He isn't just afraid of discovery, he's afraid of imprisonment. Under motivation, you can see that he serves Iuz not out of loyalty but because of his greed and hunger for power. Those little flourishes take a fairly typical statement and give it some space for improvisation.

The stat block helps you focus on an NPC's key traits while providing points for improvisation. It should provide a broad summary in a short space.

Managing Success and Failure

By framing the scene with pointers to actions, you avoid sending the players to their skill lists to puzzle out their actions. With NPCs prepared for action, you have a good grasp of how they act and are ready to improvise as needed. Now, it's time to actually run the skill challenge.

As I've mentioned in the past, it's usually best to focus on low complexity challenges. Especially in a conversation or other roleplaying scene, you reach the point where high complexity challenges fall apart. How many times do you have to lie to a guard to get him to let you through a gate? Lower complexity challenges dodge this problem.

Once you've chosen a complexity, it's time to consider what each failure or success means. This is where your preparation comes in handy, because it is impossible to predict exactly how things might play out. You are better off remaining flexible rather than specific, because you can more easily improvise a generality into a specific outcome than the reverse.

For each success and failure, consider a basic signpost for the conversation and scene. Here's an example for a skill challenge in which the characters must persuade the captain of the guard to let them into the town's jail to question an imprisoned thief. The characters' enemy, an evil magistrate, has ordered the captain to keep them away from the thief. Here are the captain's details:

Name: Captain Reldren
Key Traits: Direct, honest, threatening, plays dumb
Goal: Keep the city free of crime and violence
Motivation: Protect his family, live up to his father's example
Fears: Allowing the city to fall into chaos or tyranny
Weaknesses: Soft spot for principled vigilantes

The best source of such signposts is summarized directly above. As the characters interact with Reldren, use the summary to guide his statements and replies. You can hint at his attributes or make direct references to them. With each success, the characters learn a bit more about his background, fears, and weaknesses.

On a success, the characters learn this information while seeing that the NPC grows friendlier. Reldren might mention his fears that the city is sliding into chaos but thanks the characters for their efforts to save it. He could mention that he admires how the characters can operate without the oversight of the city government or how thugs like the thief in question are a threat to innocent folk such as Reldren's family. Each of those statements drives the action forward and gives the characters something they can play off of.

By the same token, failures work in a similar manner but indicate rising tension. If the characters fail a Diplomacy check, Reldren threatens their arrest and tells them that, like his father, he is an honest man who cannot be corrupted. Play up that link and Reldren's respect has for his father to give the characters a hook for their next move.

In this manner, you give the characters a sense of their progress without resorting to a purely mechanical notation. The NPC's actions, tone, and statement point to their progress rather than a running score of successes and failures.

Other Hazards

Here are a couple of things to look out for in roleplaying skill challenges.

The Challenge Breaker: I use this term to refer to any player action that, if successful, would logically end the challenge immediately. In the example above, the characters might offer a huge bribe for access to the cells. If the captain accepts the bribe, the challenge is over. In this case, shift the context of the challenge slightly. The first successful attempt means that the NPC is open to the bribe but has some reservations. In Reldren's case, he might be afraid of discovery. The characters must persuade him that he won't be caught. When the characters succeed at the challenge, he accepts the bribe.

Bonuses and Penalties: A bonus or penalty to a check is a great tool to encourage additional description and in-character dialogue. You should use bonuses when the characters play off an NPC's fears, weaknesses, and other personality traits. Be open about these to show the players that paying attention and reacting to the situation can earn them rewards. You can either announce a bonus or incorporate it into the narrative ("Reldren's angry scowl fades at the mention of his father's legacy") to show the players the effects of their actions.

Next Month ...

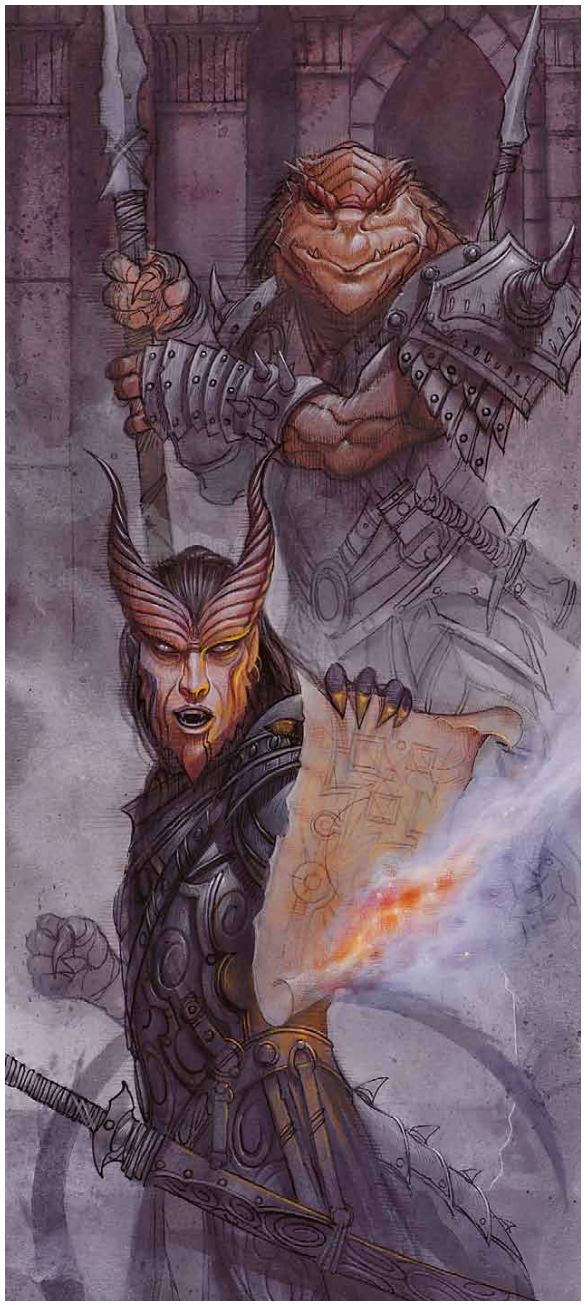
... this column will feature an example skill challenge drawing on these ideas.

About the Author

Mike Mearls is Lead Designer for the **Dungeons & Dragons** roleplaying game. His recent credits include *H1: Keep on the Shadowfell* and *Player's Handbook 2*.

Looking Back

BY JAMES WYATT
illustration by Wayne England



I'm going to have to ask your indulgence.

This month, I celebrated my tenth anniversary of working at Wizards of the Coast. In January of 2000, I moved my family from Berkeley up to the Seattle area and started work as a designer on what we then called the D&D Worlds team. I started working on *Monster Compendium: Monsters of Faerûn* right away, and I've been designing D&D products ever since. I've worked on more books than I can easily list, from *Monsters of Faerûn* to *Player's Handbook Races: Dragonborn*. Even the highlights would take a lot of space.

But rather than looking at the highlights of the books I've worked on, I thought this would be an interesting opportunity to reflect on the games I've run over the course of those ten years. What were the highlights of my bygone campaigns, and what could I draw from them to enhance my (very sporadic right now) Greenbrier campaign?

Mahasarpa

Mahasarpa was the *Oriental Adventures* campaign I ran at lunchtime during and for quite a while after the design of that book, around 2001–3. The sketchy details of the setting appeared on the Wizards of the Coast web site as a web enhancement for OA. The setting was basically an excuse to send characters into Angkor Wat to fight yuan-ti.

The campaign unfolded around a long prophecy about the end of the world. Actually, it was less a prophecy than a set of instructions for the followers of the sleeping goddess of death to wake her and unleash her on the world.

The fun part of it (fun for me, at least—I think it frustrated my players to no end) was that the player characters kept unwittingly fulfilling the prophecy or carrying out the instructions. It contributed to a real sense of desperation. Here's an example:

The instructions came from a set of carved heads in the basement of a temple. The characters fought a rakshasa in the ground level of the temple, then made their way down into a subterranean chamber filled with a river of blood. After they defeated more guardians, the heads recited this long verse:

The sleeping goddess shall awake
And start her lovely dance of doom
When seven tasks ye undertake
And seven wefts pass on the loom.
One task is done: the demon's death
Is offered as a sacrifice;

One weft is strung: the sleeper's wrath
Has called six greater in its place.
The six devouring ghosts have come,
To make their feast on living meat,
And six great tablas start to drum
The rhythm for the sleeper's feet.
The second task you must achieve
To speed the hungry ghosts along:
Destroy the one who shall conceive
The god who pipes a goatherd's song.
Then shall the second weft be strung,
The bhuts allowed their terror's reign;
Then shall Suarama's song be sung,
And all the world consumed in pain.

By killing the rakshasa in the temple above, the characters had already completed the first of the seven tasks required to free Suarama, the sleeping death goddess! The second task was completed in a roundabout sort of way: The characters were trying to protect a friendly hermit while fighting an evil priest, but the hermit got caught in the priest's area spell and died. The characters used *reincarnate* to restore the dead hermit to life—and he returned to life as a woman who was mysteriously pregnant with the goatherd-god!

This was the first campaign I ran after coming to work at Wizards, and what I'll always remember about it was the way I used that "prophecy" to keep the players on their toes, often just improvising to make sure the prophecy was fulfilled (or the instructions completed) in totally unexpected ways. Because they only ever heard one verse at a time, I could make it clear after the fact that the goal hadn't been to prevent the birth of the goatherd-god (for example), but to enable it through the hermit's death and reincarnation.

Since I've already decided that I want prophecy to play a part in my Greenbrier campaign, this is a trick I plan to remember and make further use of if I can.

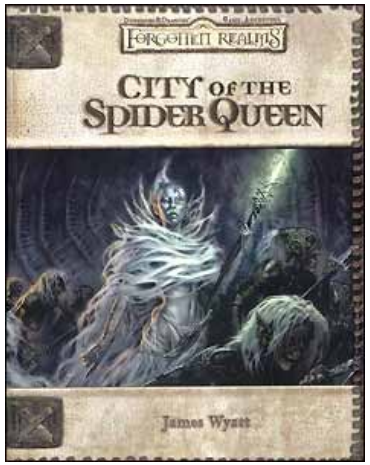
City of the Spider Queen

The first campaign I joined after I started working at Wizards was run by David Noonan and met weekly at Ed Stark's house. As I mentioned in a sidebar in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* (page 12), it took a while before I felt comfortable DMing for this group of pros, but eventually I took the helm with that group, running a playtest of the *Forgotten Realms* superadventure, *City of the Spider Queen*.

For years after that adventure came out in 2002, people would come up to me at GenCon or send me email about how much they enjoyed it—and, especially, how badly it mauled the player characters in their group. I was glad for them but secretly a little sad, because the truth is that my group waltzed through that adventure with little trouble. In particular, the big bad villain of the adventure—the albino drow priestess of Kiaransalee, Irae T'sarran—died in a matter of a round or two, barely having a chance to act.

That wasn't everyone's experience, obviously, but not everyone plays D&D with a group of players who work on the game professionally and really know how to maximize their characters' combat abilities and quickly take out an enemy they're prepared to fight. Regardless, one of the problems of the game in its 3rd Edition was that opponents built as NPCs (using all the same rules as player characters) didn't live up to their Challenge Rating. They simply weren't as tough as other monsters of their level. They also took an inordinate amount of work to put together. I still have the spreadsheets on my computer to prove it.

Irae T'sarran was a 17th-level cleric and a 3rd-level hierophant (a prestige class from the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*), and she was geared to the teeth with magic items and even an artifact designed to help get her Armor Class and saving throws up to a reasonable level for her CR. Her statistics in the adventure included a quarter page describing the spells she'd cast to prepare herself for a fight she



knew was coming and how her statistics would be different with those spells in place.

So the result was a 900-word statistics block, filling more than half a page, which included a list of 53 cleric spells she could cast. And in my game, she died less than 15 seconds after the characters burst into her inner sanctum. What a waste!

That's only the icing on that particular cake. The adventure obviously featured drow prominently, and every drow in the adventure was built using the NPC rules. I keep having fantasies about rewriting that whole adventure using the variety of drow that

already exist in 4th edition (search the *D&D Compendium* for monsters with drow in their names and you'll get 33 results as of the time I'm writing) and crafting Irae T'sarran as unique villain who can hold her own in combat against a group of 20th-level characters. I don't know that I'll ever convert the whole adventure, but I thought it would be fun to at least work on Irae T'sarran.

That's still a long stat block by 4th edition standards, but it's only 311 words and almost everything in it is something she'll use in combat. It contains everything you need to know to run Irae T'sarran—there's no need to go look up a cleric spell or magic item she's using or a power-up suite that she might or might not have a chance to use!

Irae T'sarran is not literally a cleric anymore. None of her powers come from the cleric powers lists. Her complex magic items (the *claw of the revenancer, rod of the twisted Weave,* and *eyes of the spider*) have been reduced to a single power or trait each. She doesn't even have one of the standard drow racial powers, but her *damning darkness* aura is based on the drow *cloud of darkness* power. I tried to give her powers that reflect her status as the chief priestess of the god of vengeance and undeath. If you hit her, you'll probably pay for it (she marks you with *marked for vengeance* and then hurts you on her next turn). I also tried to make her a potent controller, which she accomplishes through her aura, by weakening marked targets, and by sliding people around with her *wrath of Kiaransalee* power.

I don't think I'm going to use Irae T'sarran directly in my Greenbrier campaign, but I know one place in particular where this approach to designing NPC-like opponents will come in handy. At the climax of the *Gates of Firestorm Peak* adventure, the characters will face the mad wizard Madreus. I'm certainly not going to design him as if he were only an NPC wizard! He'll be a solo monster much like this incarnation of Irae T'sarran, and he'll be sure to hold his own for a good, long throwdown with the PCs.

Irae T'sarran **Level 20 Solo Controller**
Medium fey humanoid, drow XP 14,000

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +28; darkvision, truesight 12

Damning Darkness (Necrotic) aura 1; Irae T'sarran is surrounded by a cloud of darkness that blocks line of sight for all creatures except drow and undead. Any other creature within the aura is blinded until it exits, and a creature (other than a drow or undead) that enters or ends its turn within the aura takes 10 necrotic damage.

HP 756; **Bloodied** 378
AC 34; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 31, **Will** 33
Saving Throws +5
Speed 6
Action Points 2

⊕ **Claw of the Revenancer** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic, Weapon**
Targets two enemies; +25 vs. AC; 4d6 + 14 necrotic damage, and if the target is marked by Irae T'sarran, it is weakened until the end of her next turn.

✧ **Wrath of Kiaransalee** (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Close burst 3; targets enemies in burst; +23 vs. Fortitude; 4d6 + 14 necrotic damage, and slide the target 3 squares.

ǂ **Rod of the Twisted Weave** (standard action; encounter)
Targets an adjacent conjuration or zone; +23 vs. the Will of the effect's creator; the conjuration or zone is destroyed and all of its effects end, and the creator of the conjuration or zone takes 2d10 + 14 necrotic damage.

Marked for Vengeance
A creature that hits Irae T'sarran is marked by her until the end of its next turn. Irae T'sarran deals 1d10 extra damage with her attacks against targets she has marked, or 2d10 if she is bloodied.

Eyes of the Spider
Flanking enemies do not gain combat advantage against Irae T'sarran.

White Banshee's Blessing
When subjected to an effect that a save can end, Irae T'sarran can make an immediate saving throw.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Arcana +21, Religion +21

Str 14 (+12)	**Dex** 17 (+13)	**Wis** 26 (+18)
Con 21 (+15)	**Int** 23 (+16)	**Cha** 18 (+14)

Eberron

Between 2004 and 2005, I ran a monthly Eberron campaign set mostly in Xen'drik. (My *Dungeon* adventure, "The Queen with Burning Eyes" in *Dungeon* #113, was the first adventure for this campaign.)

The characters had a contact at Morgrave University in Sharn: Tala Karrna, who appeared as Dala Arand in the *Sharn: City of Towers* sourcebook. She was a kind and helpful scholar who accompanied the characters on their expeditions to Xen'drik (while remaining a noncombatant), but she was also a spy for the Order of the Emerald Claw who ended up betraying the characters, turning the artifacts they'd collected over to a blackguard leader of the Order, and fleeing with him on his nightmare steed.

The characters in that campaign only reached 8th level by the time we wrapped it up, but that didn't prevent me from centering the campaign on their acquisition of six powerful artifacts: the Regalia of Good and the Regalia of Evil, described in the 3rd edition *Book of Vile Darkness* and *Book of Exalted Deeds*. I referred to these artifacts by different names: the Crown of Sondar Thaj, the Orb of Kevrik the Crusader, the Crown of the Frozen Hammer, the Scepter of Fell Khadash, and so on. (There's a sidebar in the 3rd edition *Player's Guide to Eberron* describing my take on these artifacts for my game.) Naturally, the characters started off looking for them at Tala Karrna's behest, because the Order of the Emerald Claw wanted them. However, the ogre mage warchief of

Darguun, Tzaryan Rrac, was also seeking to acquire the regalia and sent agents to warn the characters and attempt to stop them from acquiring the items.

Of course, I used the artifacts purely as macguffins to drive the story. Except perhaps at the end of the campaign, the characters handled the artifacts but never used them, though they had some of the powers of the *Scepter of Evil* used against them when Tala Karrna betrayed them. The artifacts they found and managed to keep, they locked away in a *Leomund's secret chest* to keep them safe from their enemies who sought them.

4th Edition has a bit more of an expectation that artifacts can be used by the characters who come into possession of them without breaking the game or throwing the campaign out of whack. It might be interesting in the Greenbrier campaign to explore a similar idea, even at relatively low levels.

Right now, the characters are moving through the dungeons of Greenbrier Chasm, purifying the altars to various deities. What if, when they purify the last altar, they come into possession of an artifact, perhaps one of a set ... maybe even one of the Regalia of Good? That could be a theme that runs through the campaign for several levels. As I think about it, though, the best time to do that probably is at the conclusion of their *second* foray into the Chasm, leading up to their visit to Cendriane, their passage through Harrows Pass, and their arrival at Firestorm Peak. Alternatively, I could incorporate it into the superadventure version of Firestorm Peak that I outlined in episode 16.

I'm not sure the Regalia of Good is the right set of artifacts to use in this campaign—I might want something with more of a primal feel. And I'd want them to help the party, so I'd design them as if they were a group item set like the ones in *Adventurer's Vault 2*, which grant additional benefits if the group as a whole has multiple items from the set but not if only a single character wields multiple artifacts. It's certainly worth giving more thought to. What would make it particularly interesting is if someone else also wants the artifacts for less noble purposes. Maybe (as I touched on in my Eberron campaign) the draconic Chamber is trying to prevent the artifacts from being found at all.

The Key Thing

In addition to these campaigns, I've run a lot of playtests and other one-shot or short-lived games in the last ten years. I ran a two-week 4th edition playtest minicampaign based on the *Dwellers of the Forbidden City* adventure which provided the inspiration for the ode to the superadventure that appears in the DMG. I also organized a lunchtime random dungeon game in which I participated as both a player and sort of a DM, which gave birth to the "Playing without a DM" section on page 195 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

In fact, I've realized lately how much of my writing about the art of the Dungeon Master comes from the fact that I am a DM with very little time to prepare, and that campaign was the perfect exemplar of that idea. Maybe the best lesson from all this is that being a DM is supposed to be fun and doesn't need to be a ton of work. For those of us trying to juggle jobs, families, writing novels, and monthly columns for D&D Insider (OK, maybe that's just me), it's a great reminder that the game has a lot to offer even if you don't have a lot of time to put into it.

My wife and I hosted a party on New Year's Day this year, inviting a number of our friends from the various theater productions we've been involved in over the past several years. To my surprise, the party turned into a big D&D game. I used the D&D Character Builder to crank out nine 1st-level characters, then pitted them against a dragon and its abundant kobold minions. It was a spur-of-the-moment thing with virtually no preparation, in the middle of a party (sandwiched between making fudge and playing Rock Band). I think everyone had fun, even those who had never played the game before. Now I'm toying with the idea of turning some subset of that group into a regular campaign ... in all my free time. But who knows? As I think about it, it doesn't really require *that* much time ... .

About the Author

James Wyatt is the D&D Design Manager for Wizards of the Coast Roleplaying R&D. He was one of the lead designers for 4th Edition D&D and the primary author of the 4th Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide*. He was one of the designers of the *Eberron® Campaign Setting* and is the author of several *Eberron* novels.

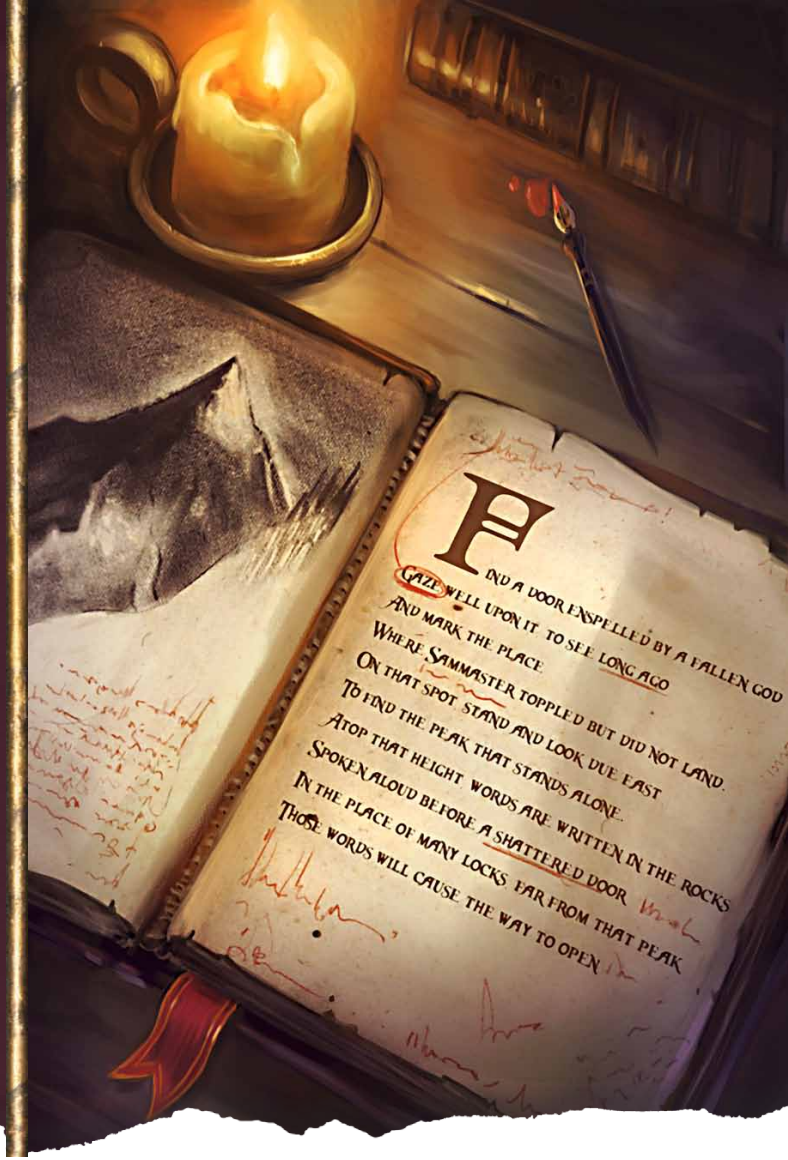
FORGOTTEN REALMS®

Ed Greenwood's Eye on the Realms

by Ed Greenwood

illustration by Jorge Lacera

The Way of Lost Power


Find a door enspelled by a fallen god
Gaze well upon it to see long ago
And mark the place
Where Sammaster toppled but did not land.
On that spot stand and look due east
To find the peak that stands alone.
Atop that height words are written in the rocks
Spoken aloud before a shattered door
In the place of many locks far from that peak
Those words will cause the way to open

For centuries, wizards across the Realms have heard scores of exaggerated, sometimes entirely fanciful, tales about various lost books of spells or rituals and processes that could swiftly make them mighty in magic. These tales include stories of haunted books, books wherein the opinionated talking souls of wizards are trapped, books that slay the unwary or spew forth guardian monsters if handled without proper precautions—many legends for many books.

There are also recurring rumors of lone pages containing spells, or even reams torn from lost books of magic, turning up in cluttered old bookstores in Waterdeep, Athkatla, Crimmor, Tarmalune, or another city in the Realms—or sitting in a library, secondhand trunk, or dusty attic or cellar, there for the taking. Tales of magic books that will benefit anyone (not just spellcasters) are rarer, but they, too, are firmly part of Realms legend.

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Yet, it seems at least one such book is indeed real. Numerous copies of it are now in circulation, and folk across the Realms are reading and following its lore to gain real magical power. Some have already, run the whispers, become masters of wizardry.

This wildly popular tome—a plain, slim chapbook—is The Way of Lost Power.

The Tale of the Book

Although several versions of the chapbook are now being sold and resold across the Realms, the original version—of which most sages believe there were definitely more than thirty copies, and possibly as many as seventy—has 22 pages, including the outer covers. The covers bear the title of the book right-side-up on the front cover, and upside down on the back cover, and are of the same parchment as the interior pages. No author or publisher attribution is present, although some later editions spuriously give authorship as "Velahoondar," "Volo, of course," "Old Elminster," "Khelben the Younger," and "The Thrice-Martyred." No one alive today, it seems, is certain who wrote the original book. All copies are handwritten, and all of the true originals (as some sages call the first edition) were written by the same person in strong black ink, in the Common Tongue. Most later editions are shorter than 22 pages (running instead to 20, 18, or 16), and contain text alterations intended—according to several sages who have carefully compared editions—to try to conceal the fact that pages have been omitted. Popular opinion is that these omissions are deliberate attempts to lead readers of the later editions astray. That is, later editions are callous attempts to separate the gullible from good coin in return for a book that can't possibly lead them to the same places as does the original.

This view is hotly disputed by some, a few of whom contend that this or that shorter version is the true one, and the "extra" pages are the spurious misdirection. Debates about the origins and intentions of the *Way* can also become strong.

The most diligent sages say a few copies of the "true original" first came to notice in Scornubel or Iriaebor twenty-one or twenty-two years ago. Other editions started to appear about fourteen years ago, and news of the tome didn't spread until eight winters back, its popularity rising steadily since—especially in the wake of several widely discussed book thefts and the murders of *Way* owners.

What the Inner Pages Hold

To understand how an altered version of this book can lead anyone astray, it's necessary to know why the contents of the tome have made it so popular. Simply put, *The Way of Lost Power* purports to outline a path to hidden great magic of old—magic that should be found by anyone who follows the clues in the book to reach various sites and correctly interprets lore found there, such as words graven in rocks or the shape and semblance of reflections in particular pools.

The chapbook contains passwords or partial explanations of how to safely and successfully navigate places that hold magical lore. The book also offers some tantalizing fragments of the lore held in each described location. Once the secrets hidden in the location are recovered, they can then be combined with the fragments in the book to reveal a trail that leads to a single ultimate destination: a site none have found purported to hold many lost secrets of great magic.

For instance, according to the sage Feldran Omprael, one page directs the reader to:

Find a door enspelled by a fallen god
Gaze well upon it, to see long ago
And mark the place
Where Sammaster toppled but did not land.
On that spot, stand and look due east
To find the peak that stands alone.
Atop that height, words are written in the rocks.
Spoken aloud before a shattered door
In the place of many locks, far from that peak
Those words will cause the way to open.

Other sages (and chapbook owners, though revealing ownership might be dangerous these days) are less specific about *Way* contents, but those who will speak of it generally agree that its pages are filled with similarly cryptic instructions. Some *Way* passages must be followed first to gain necessary information for a reader to achieve success at sites described elsewhere in the book, but no single "grand sequence" exists. This has undoubtedly helped some of the increasing numbers of treasure-seekers ("caravans-full," as the ranger of the Dales, Halthun Aumlandarr, recently observed) to retain their lives, since prowling beasts and brigands alike inevitably prey on steady streams of wilderland travelers anywhere.

Because the chapbook has recently "caught on," however, those trying to find its sites and puzzle out its secrets are becoming as numerous and excited as fervent believers on a pilgrimage. Occasionally, seekers have been murdered or devoured by wild beasts, and several have simply vanished—though persistent rumors insist they have disappeared after gaining the powerful magic promised in the book and are using it to conceal themselves from all who would hunt them for it while they build new and splendid lives.

The Secret of the Tome?

Before his own recent alleged disappearance from his bedchamber—a chamber torn from the top of a tall, austere stone tower one moonless spring night—the sage Mavrand Aumthaeras of Gheldaneth published a chapbook of his own that purports to explain the origins of the wildly-popular *The Way of Lost Power*.

Aumthaeras called his tome *The Way of Deceit*, and its pages set forth "proofs" (culled from interviews with escaped slaves) that the chapbook promising "great magic" is a "fabrication of falsehoods"—a lure concocted by the slave-taking dragon Halagaunthogh.

This elder red dragon inhabits a remote mountain valley hidden among the peaks of the Copper Mountains—a long, narrow vale crowded with human, gnome, and dwarf slaves, for Halagaunthogh's greatest delight lies in dominating intelligent but lesser creatures.

The Way of Lost Power, Aumthaeras writes, leads ultimately to two portals (depending on how the clues are followed) in wilderland locales of the Realms. Both portals allow passage to living creatures, and both lead to the shores of a stinking, polluted lake at the heart of the dragon's valley. Those who traverse both portals also find all their items, worn or carried, snatched away. The gear is teleported atop a bare tor halfway along the vale for Halagaunthogh's eventual inspection. Valuables are taken into his hoard, and the rest he flies into the mountains and drops from on high, to keep tools and weapons out of the hands of his slaves)

Cold, fast streams that flow from the surrounding mountains into the lake water the dragon's vale, and it is crowded with herds of captured livestock—including slaves. Halagaunthogh examines arrivals much like the gear, separating them into "mere food" or "slaves whose talents will be useful" in the dragon's schemes to hunt down and eliminate rival dragons and take their hoards.

According to Aumthaeras, this fate awaits all who follow the *Way*. Any "great magic" involved is the dragon's, and his hoard is steadily augmented by gear snatched by the portals.

Other Views

Unsurprisingly, other sages disagree with Aumthaeras and cleave to other beliefs about the truth behind the book. Indragar Jhallurt of Athkatla, for example, has written that the chapbook is the work of "those who stubbornly cling to belief that Azuth and Mystra survive in silent hiding, or perhaps a lesser rival god of magic like Savras, seeking to restore or re-found a faith of a great deity of magic. Those who follow its clues will be offered clerical appointments, divine service, and magic to wield once this 'new church of magic' is ready."

Although no one can be certain who wrote the chapbook, why, or what "great magic" (if any) it leads to, this much is true: *something* lies behind it because the sites, and what can be found there, are real and aren't singular, and the nature of these clues is such that the first arrival at a site can't take away something so later questers won't find it. Although only the explanation given by Aumthaeras has any supporting evidence (and he and the slaves he interviewed have since been "snatched" by unknown hands), the popularity of *The Way of Lost Power* is still growing.

Adventure Hooks

Calling Gem: Unbeknownst to the dragon, one of the gems recently taken into its hoard is a message taker that teleports itself to specific locales and emits a *magic mouth* spoken message when it appears there (a way of requesting help or reinforcements when sent forth by its adventurer owner). Proximity to other magic in the hoard has awakened it, and it now teleports to random locales around the Realms, uttering several cryptic messages scrambled from past messages it has delivered. Such words are capable of luring characters to the valley or into other adventures.

Sinkhole: A mild earth tremor causes part of the valley floor to collapse into ancient dwarven delves just beneath the vale. Opportunistic war-bands of Underdark creatures stream forth, and the angry dragon is kept busy trying to destroy or drive them back while at the same time herding its own livestock and slaves away from the sinkhole.

Garthyn the Sage: One of the dragon's newest slaves is a sage named Garthyn, who blundered into one of the portals. He's an expert in three fields: cookery, herb-lore, and magic items—and he has seen the dragon sort through items atop the tor and then fly a select few to the hoard. He's excited by the possibility of examining (not seizing, just experimenting with) magic items up close...but he can't reach the hoard. If adventurers will help him get to the hoard, they can certainly have the items after he's finished examining them.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and even romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is still happiest churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. There are still a few rooms in his house with space left to pile up papers in . . .